TRIGGER HAPPY

FROM THE ULTRA VIOLENCE
OF DOOM TO THE PRESTIGE
OF CALL OF DUTY

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Hall Of Fame...
Duke Nukem

As the future of Duke Nukem Forever drifts further into limbo, this issue we look back at the blonde bombshell, who proved 'nobody steals our chicks... and lives'

RARELY WILL YOU see a manufactured hero in a first-person shooter. The genre traditionally chooses not to breathe character and personality into its heroes precisely because it is designed to cast you firmly inside those boots. Many would argue that having a boisterous protagonist would smash the delicate scales of immersion upon which the genre rests. After all, in the worlds of *Doom* and *Quake*, two of the biggest FPS games to ever grace PC screens, there was little in the way of narrative or a focal hero tying events together, and if there was, such as *Wolfenstein 3D*'s American GI, William 'BJ' Blazkowicz, they rarely muttered a word during their whole sorry ordeal, other than the occasional grunt to demonstrate their displeasure at being shot at. First-person shooters, at least in these early days, were nothing more than an avatar that you couldn't see.

IN 1996 THOUGH, a seismic shift occurred. One that changed the way developers looked at the genre. The world saw a new kind of FPS – one that immersed the player in worlds primed with all manner of interactivity, rather than claustrophobic corridors, and starred a steroid-chomping muscle-bound hero who sprayed quips as quick as bullets. Moreover, the game was a brilliant parody of the genre it existed in. Duke was a machismo videogame hero, the likes of which no one had ever quite seen before. He was a one-man army with more muscles than brain cells. And the irony was that the success of the series rested firmly on his shoulders. Had 3D Realms opted to go down the safer option and cast us in the driving seat, we suspect the game would've been swallowed up by the 3D models of Quake and Unreal quicker than you could say 'shake it, baby'.

While most people remember Duke for his first 3D outing on the PC, Duke Nukem actually started life in a 1991 2D platform shooter by Apogee Software (the shareware company that helped push *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Doom* out to the masses in id's fledgling days). Originally, Duke wasn't as arrogant as he was in his 3D days. He didn't wear his iconic shades, he looked a bit like Flash Gordon, and his actions were far less irreverent. Also, due to some early copyright befuddlement – Apogee thought the name *Duke Nukem* had already been trademarked – Duke was originally christened 'Duke Nukum' before it was changed in *Duke Nukem II*. When 3D Realms, an arm of Apogee Software, saw the plaudits being picked up by *Doom* and *Quake*, they sought to use their experience within the FPS genre to release a new type of FPS game onto the market, and dusted off Duke to play the hero because 'the name rhymed and nuking things sounded cool', or so the story goes.

For Duke's first 3D foray, the decision was made late in the game's development to ply it with excess, and irreverent humour. Duke's persona was influenced by two iconic stars of the big screen: John Wayne and Clint Eastwood. His physical appearance, however, was more akin to Arnold Schwarzenegger or Dolph Lundgren. It was Nukem's repertoire of audible quips and catchphrases that best showed his wide range of cinematic influences and became the most effective way to express his characteristics in the absence of an in-game visual presence. Memorable lines like "It's time to kick ass and chew bubble gum and I'm all outta gum" (taken from *They Live*) or "Hail to the king, baby" (*Army Of Darkness*) drew on a rich history of cult action heroes and established Duke among the ranks of B-movie greats like Rowdy Roddy Piper and Bruce Campbell.

Over the years, Duke's immeasurable ego and popularity has seen him appear in over 18 games and expansion packs. But despite the many console side projects and add-ons, fans are still waiting patiently for the official follow-up to *Duke Nukem 3D*. The aptly titled *Duke Nukem Forever* may never actually be released, after 12 years in development hell. Several teaser trailers have led us to expect an even more tongue-in-cheek pastiche of the muscle-bound Eighties action hero, and lord knows we need one. In 2009 it seems the FPS hero falls into either the generic '*Doom* guy' mould or the more realistic but less fun template set out by Gordon Freeman. Such characters have their place of course, but in a genre that is first and foremost about shooting everything in sight, we sometimes yearn for a man who's simply prepared to "make those alien bastards pay".

>. MAGIC MOMENTS

■ Duke smashed onto our screens in 1991 in a side-scrolling PC shooter from Apogee Software.

■ Apogee releases a sequel, but this time Duke gets a name change. Duke Nukem is born.

■ When Duke asks this exotic dancer to 'shake it, baby', she kindly obliges.

■ The ridiculous trailer for the *Duke Nukem* trilogy caused a stir at last year's E3.

HAIR

Duke's look is clearly based on that of an Eighties action star. Although he's said to be based on Clint Eastwood and John Wayne, we reckon Duke is more one dollop of Snake Plisskin and a dash of Dolph Lundgren. And given the Los Angeles setting of *Duke Nukem 3D*, and frequent movie references in the game, the comparison makes perfect sense.

MOUTH

To help add a sense of character to Duke, 3D Realms cleverly armed him with a script full of memorable one-liners. Such classics include "my boot, your face; the perfect couple", and "you're an inspiration for birth control". But our personal favourite is "what are you? Some bottom-feeding, scum-sucking algae eater?"

MUSCLES

Duke has more muscles than he can count, and it's a good thing, too, considering the size of some of the aliens he's had to take down. We're sure Duke would swear his physique is all down to a diet of gym and determination, and nothing to do with the speed-giving steroid packs he picks up during his mission. Well, we wouldn't argue with him.

ARM

Any FPS worth its salt must boast an impressive stockpile of heavy ordnance. Thankfully, Duke is blessed with some truly memorable firepower and gadgets to play with. The most iconic, of course, being the powerful Devastator, the Jet Pack and the Shrink Ray, which Duke can use in tandem with his Mighty Foot to squish the alien Rozzers into pixelated Frazzles.

SHADES

Although Duke didn't wear sunglasses until *Duke Nukem 3D*, the shades have since remained an iconic part of his attire. The odd thing though, which nobody ever seems to question, is that despite wearing sunglasses, the player's viewpoint is as clear as daylight.

■ Duke kicks a field goal using this boss's eyeball as a football.

■ Duke finds himself in the Wild West in *Zero Hour*. Naturally, he fits right in.

■ When it's done it's done. Or not, as the case may be. Rest in peace, 3D Realms…

■ Duke had to pinch himself when he received the mission entitled Planet of the Babes.

A Day In The Life Of Duke

> We follow a typical day for Duke Nukem and see how the King of Chaos likes to chill out after saving the planet from bottom-feeding, scum-sucking algae eaters... or blowing a small chunk of it up for the greater good

9:00am

> **Right, so I** get up when I want – except on Wednesdays when I get rudely awakened by the dustmen. My usual Wednesday-morning ritual includes perching outside my bedroom window pointing a shotgun at the garbage truck while screaming profanities. Don't worry though, the gun's empty... most of the time, and there's normally quite a comical tone to my swearing voice.

9:15am

> **After a big** bowl of Steroid Crispies, flushed down with half a pint of gin and a banana, I take my dog Bonkers for a walk. I named him after that catchy Dizzee Rascal track that gets played on the radio, like, 17 times an hour. After walking through the cemetery to feed the squirrels and put fresh flowers on the gravestones of my dead pets, me and Bonkers usually play catch-the-pipe-bomb in the football stadium.

> PLAY MOVIE
> INSIDE LOOK
> LANGUAGE

A Day In The Life Of Duke

11:00am

❭ **I usually exercise** with Bonkers and then catch a movie at the multiplex. What's on today? Ah, brilliant, *Million Dollar Baby* (again). That film is to *Rocky* what *Coyote Ugly* is to *Cocktail*. Oh, wait a minute. It seems there's a new flick in: At Ack Of Th Ble Ched Blon Biker Bimb S? Sounds foreign, I'm sold. Hopefully there'll be some fully naked Eastern-European chicks in it, and very little in the way of a plot.

11:15am

❭ **After purchasing my** ticket, I barge my way to the front of the concessions stand to buy sustenance and leer at any hot chicks I push over in the queue. Apparently the ugly-looking alien working behind the counter said hotdogs were going to be a 15-minute wait because a pig bought the last one off the roller. I pull out a gun and the clerk manages to improve my odds. Now I only have to wait 14 minutes.

11:30am

❭ **This film rocks.** And it's not foreign. It's about a girl with large hair who dances around in her bra and pants while holding a gun. This is my kind of film. Although some guy in an overcoat at the front of the screen keeps groaning, and it's starting to piss me off. I politely point a rocket launcher at his head and he makes a loud plopping noise. Mission over, I get back to watching the woman in her pants.

SCENE SELECTION

2:00pm

❭ **In the afternoon** I often hunt Easter eggs. Just grab a star map and go exploring, you'll find plenty of celebrities and pop culture references. Today I bumped into one of those *Doom* marines, but it seems someone beat me to it. And by the look of things, that Indiana Jones chap just read my review of *Kingdom Of The Crystal Skull* on my blog and took it badly. Perhaps it was harsh to compare it to *Hotel For Dogs*.

4:00pm

❭ **Wednesday is** two-for-one at Tassels, my local strip bar. As I get more bang for my buck, I spend the rest of my day here until I get bored or the bouncers kick me out. Most of the girls are really bright and are just doing this before going on to do other things. Take Trixie here, she's just a perpetual clothes taker-offer to pay her way through medical school. I respect that. Here's 50 bucks to 'shake 'em, baby'.

MAIN MENU
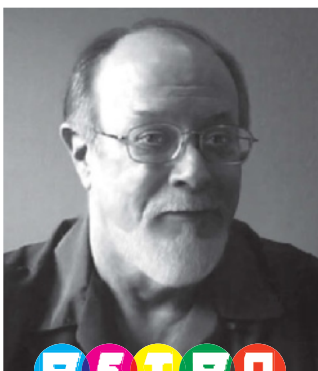
INTERVIEW

STEPHEN HORNBACK

The artist behind the Duke Nukem series talks about his passion for art, joining Apogee, his legendary work on the classic franchise, his sudden departure from the company and proof that there is life after Duke

Behind every classic game there are many creators that help to bring an idea to reality. Usually, unless someone is a figurehead of a company, they often go unknown and unappreciated for their efforts. However, when it comes to the *Duke Nukem* franchise, a series that is best remembered for its slick, gritty and impressive visuals, the name Stephen A Hornback should be ringing in your ears. Originating from a small town in southern Ohio that focused on the steel industry, Stephen's love for art started at an early age. In fact, his bio on his website proudly proclaims, "My passion and my life is art." Through interviewing Stephen, this quickly becomes apparent. His passion hits home when he not only speaks of the old days, but also when he mentions his latest artistic endeavours. *Duke Nukem*'s unsung hero sits down with us to discuss his lengthy career, one that has had its fair share of ups and downs.

First off, could you give us a little background about yourself?
I'm originally from a small town in the American midwest, southern Ohio to be exact. Steel was the town's livelihood, though my father ran an office supply store. This gave me access to art supplies, so I dabbled in art a bit. When I was in high school, I had to decide to pursue art or science. I couldn't imagine making a living back then as a starving artist, so I picked the sciences, but I maintained art as a hobby.

I went to college, but ran short of funds. So I worked for many years in industrial jobs and, after completing my degree, as an engineer for Westinghouse. During that time I finally got a chance to work on games.

How would you describe your art style and how you approach your work?
I love making things as immersive for the player as possible. My style is often more realistic than fantasy as I want the players to feel like they are in a real place. I've always worked hard to create a cohesive environment for any game I've worked on.

How did you come about landing your role at Apogee?
While an engineer at Westinghouse, I had gotten my first computer and was looking for inexpensive software for it. Someone showed me a catalogue with something called 'shareware'. As I glanced through it, I saw some rough clip art graphics (some were pretty bad too!). Well, I had already been playing around with drawing some digital

> **I LOVE MAKING THINGS IMMERSIVE FOR THE PLAYER... I WANT THEM TO FEEL LIKE THEY ARE IN A REAL PLACE**

pictures which I felt were better than the art in the catalogue, so I sent them off to that shareware company for possible inclusion in their catalogue.

They not only got in the catalogue, but won second place in a shareware submission contest they were sponsoring. I was beaten by a game – *Duke Nukem*. Well,

GOLD

DEVELOPER COMMENTS

Stephen's 3D modelling techniques and artwork are what made *Duke 3D* (and *Shadow Warrior*) such an immersive gaming experience. I'll never forget the thrill of feeling as if I was in the game, a real part of it… especially during *Duke* matches online with my brother. The hair on the back of my neck would stand up every time I played. I believe this was mostly due to the realism of the atmosphere created by artists such as Stephen. His contributions to *Duke Nukem 3D* can not be overlooked when you discuss the success of that game.

JON ST JOHN (VOICE OF DUKE FROM DUKE NUKEM 3D ONWARDS) ON STEPHEN A HORNBACK

■ While rather useless against smaller, quicker enemies, the RPG is best kept for boss battles.

apparently, Scott Miller at Apogee had been checking the results of that contest. They needed an artist for their next game, and he saw that I'd gotten second place to *Duke*. So one night (believe it or not I was playing *Commander Keen* at the time) the phone rang, and Scott asked if I'd be interested in working on their next (then unnamed) game. I agreed, of course; and spent my days at Westinghouse and my night's working on the game at home. I was even lucky enough to name it: *Cosmo's Cosmic Adventure*.

Duke Nukem 2 arguably defined the look of future titles. Give us an idea on how you approached your work on it.
Well, I did create the *Duke 2* character, but George Broussard touched up the head to make his face a little leaner/meaner. Duke looked great. Back then we used a program called Deluxe Paint and Deluxe Animation. I was still stuck with only 16 colours for *Duke 2* as well. The overall look was often inspired by movies of the time; sci-fi thrillers like *Total Recall* come to mind.

Early on in development, *Rise Of The Triad* was actually being created as a sequel to *Wolfenstein 3D*. Tell us about the original plan for the sequel to *Wolfenstein 3D*.
Rise Of The Triad was supposed to be the sequel. To my knowledge, though, it was to have been more of the same stuff that was in the original with a Tom Hall twist. But things changed when I was told that someone insulted id during a meeting, and with *Doom* coming out id cancelled the project. The engine was then rewritten, and the game changed to *Rise Of The Triad*. In our game we had the ability to look up and down; *Doom* didn't. So the programmers went over to id, told them about it, and that's why you can look up and down in *Doom*.

Just to highlight how archaic things were back then, Tom and the programmers made a decision to get the

animations by building a giant turntable (artists were looked down on and almost never consulted about anything then). On the turntable were mounted costumed Apogee employees who were posed in an action position, and then filmed while spun around in 45 degree increments. It was my job then to cut out and touch up each image. We had to almost double the number of characters that would have ended up in the game, but due to floppy disk restrictions about half were cut. This mistake probably wasted about six months of my work.

Tell us about how you approached creating the 3D Realms logo.
Shortly after *Rise Of The Triad* was completed, Scott Miller and George came into my office, saying they needed a new logo right away. When I got home that evening, I sat on my sofa sketching concept after concept. Eventually I designed a version not too dissimilar from what became the final logo. The idea was simply to get the letters 3D and rotate the 3 and D to emphasise the 3D aspect. The next day it was finished, and when George came in he said, "Looks like we got a keeper".

Many gamers see *Duke Nukem 3D* as the pinnacle of the series. Give us an impression of the attitude and feeling inside 3D Realms.
With *Duke 3D*, everything seemed to go right. Apogee/3D Realms had hired a good director. I was highly motivated, as I was told that I was to receive three per cent royalty. So yes, we had an extremely talented group of individuals, everyone was working very

■ After killing all the Pig Cops, Duke has the theatre to himself.

DEVELOPER COMMENTS

■■■ *Duke Nukem 3D* caused quite a lot of controversy upon release. While some of this was aimed at actual scenes within the game, others, such as the claim by Media Watch that the player gets points "for the murder of these mostly prostituted and partially nude women" were completely unfounded. In fact, the game actually punished the player for such actions by spawning more enemies. Regardless, to avoid an outright ban in various countries, a censored version of *Duke Nukem 3D* was issued. In response to its controversial material, Stephen A Hornback says, "His tough-guy image set him apart, and it was pushed especially hard by George Broussard to make sure the game received a rating that depicted it as the most offensive game possible. This would maximise sales. I personally liked some of it and disliked some of it. I know there were many arguments about how far to take it, but it seems with *Duke 3D* it was taken just far enough but not too far."

DUKE NUKEM 3D CONTROVERSY, QUOTE FROM STEPHEN A. HORNBACK

hard, and we were trying to make the game as fun as possible.

But after the project was completed, things changed. I was told my royalty would not be three per cent, but only one per cent. Not only was it a slap in the face, but to me that was the same as them stealing money right out of my pocket. Greg Malone left the company, and several talented programmers, an artist, and a level designer left to start Ritual Entertainment. Chuck Jones left to go work for Valve because he was unhappy with the way he was being treated. He wasn't even invited to E3 when *Duke 3D* was finished, and I remember how bad he felt about being left out of that. A lot of wonderful talent left then, and 3D Realms was never the same.

Why did you leave Apogee/3D Realms?
When the in-house development of *Prey* was cancelled, I wasn't given much work for *DNF*, but I tried to get as involved as I was being allowed. Artist/level designer bonds had already been established, and I felt a bit like an outsider. Then I experienced a medical problem. While mowing the lawn, I suffered a major heart attack in April 2000. I worked hard to recover and get back to work as quickly as possible. Upon returning a short time later, my contract was terminated a few weeks after my return.

I was called into George B's office, and the three higher-ups were there. I was told by Scott Miller that I was being laid off. Steven Blackburn (office manager) said "It's not like we're going to replace you or anything." George B made some comment like my art wasn't good enough for 3D Realms. Anyway, that was that. A short time later I was interviewed by Rogue

After Stephen's sudden departure from Apogee, he found a new home with Rogue Entertainment, creators of *American McGee's Alice* in 2000.

Entertainment, who was making *American McGee's Alice*. When asked why I left 3D Realms, I told them what Miller and Blackburn had said; and I was immediately informed by one of the interviewers that 3D Realms was indeed seeking a new artist! It didn't matter

> EVERYTHING SEEMED TO GO RIGHT [WITH DUKE 3D]...WE HAD AN EXTREMELY TALENTED GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS

because Rogue hired me anyway. That was really a great place to work!

Another sad end to that story was that my termination contract specified that Apogee Software Ltd (aka 3D Realms) was to pay me a certain amount of money when *Duke Nukem Forever* reached certain milestones. Several of these milestones have already been reached, but they have informed me that they will do nothing to honour these obligations. I tried negotiating, but to no avail. I certainly do not wish to take

legal action against them, but they leave a person little choice.

In 2000 you worked on *American McGee's Alice*, a vast departure in terms of design from previous titles you were a part of. How did you approach this dark psychological horror?
It was a fabulous experience. A great group of very talented developers, awesome managers and a delightful working environment made this one of the best times I ever had making a game. The idea was brilliant, and I was happy to lend a hand wherever I could. It was great to be back in creative production again. I was very happy with how the project turned out. It was sad, though, when EA decided not to move forward with the PS2 version of the game, and Rogue went out of business soon after. Many of the development team went on to form Nerve Software. I often wish I'd gone with them.

You're currently one of the owners of Soldak Entertainment. What do you think they offer in terms of new game experiences?
Steven Peeler, Soldak's president, is an absolutely brilliant game designer. I was honoured when Steven asked me to join the company full time as an owner. Soldak states its goal is focused on bringing new and unique gameplay to the entertainment industry. With real-time interactive worlds, our games provide a player with a new and different experience with every game. I got sick of testing *Duke 3D* because it was the same thing every play-through. But I never tired of testing *Din's Curse* because every game is different. I know that gamers will always get their money's worth when buying a Soldak game. Another great thing about Soldak is that they actually listen to their fans and take their comments/suggestions/criticisms to heart. That way we can make games for gamers.

Have any last words for our readers?
Buy Soldak's latest title *Drox Operative* so I can eat something other than beans on toast!

Designed by Chuck Jones, the Octabrain – alongside the Pig Cops – remains one of Duke Nukem's most recognisable foes.

GAME CHANGERS
DOOM

Released: 1993 **Publisher:** id Software **Developer:** id Software **System:** PC

PICKED UP A CLIP.

156 AMMO 100% HEALTH ARMS 124% ARMOR

BULL 156 / 200
SHEL 28 / 50
RCKT 0 / 50
CELL 0 / 300

Early in Doom's development, id Software toyed with the idea of making the game a straight adaptation of the movie Aliens.

We take an in-depth look at how id Software's venerable title changed the face of first-person shooting forever

THERE ARE MOMENTS in videogames that you never forget. For some it's seeing *Mario* run around a three-dimensional world for the first time, while others will recall the first time they shot through their own base so they could attack the incoming waves of *Space Invaders*. Many more, though, will remember the first time they laid eyes on id Software's epic masterpiece *Doom* – a game that changed PC gaming, and the first-person shooter genre, forever.

Doom wasn't the first game of its kind – it essentially rode the blood-spattered coattails of id Software's very own *Wolfenstein 3D*, a riotous blaster that combined aggressive shooting with The Third Reich. But *Doom*'s reach and impact spread far further than *Wolfenstein*, so much so that many gamers actually think the latter came out later.

At one stage *Doom* was everywhere and everyone was playing it. Valve's Gabe Newell once revealed to Bloomberg that when he was working at Microsoft it decided to start checking the computers of customers to find out the extent of Windows' market share. It was done at immense cost to Microsoft and Newell revealed that 20 million people were using Windows.

An impressive figure. That is, of course, until you realise that despite those amazing numbers Windows wasn't the most installed application. It was id Software's *Doom*.

The amazing thing here is that *Doom* wasn't even distributed at a retail level; it was simply distributed via bulletin boards and other pre-internet methods. Newell was astonished at the reach a tiny team of developers could have compared to the 500+ staff of Microsoft, calling it a "lightning bolt" moment. Newell decided that a change was coming and games like *Doom* were the future. He eventually left Microsoft to co-found Valve Software in 1996.

So how did *Doom* become so successful? There are numerous reasons, but the fact it was shareware was incredibly important to the game's overall success. After being downloaded (it was originally available from Software Creations BBS and an FTP server at the University Of Wisconsin-Madison) gamers had access to the entire first episode of the epic blaster (it would eventually consist of four full chapters). Once the chapter was complete it was possible to pay for and unlock the rest of the game. The other benefit of shareware was just that:

ESSENTIAL DOOM MODS

DOOM IS WELL KNOWN FOR ITS MODDING SCENE. HERE ARE SOME OF OUR FAVOURITES...

GHOSTBUSTERS

★ Created by "Scuba Steve" Browning, this is a fun mod that features locations from the film as well as weapons that range from the ghost trap to the PKE Meter and Ecto-1. Power-ups come in the form of Twinkies and the Ghostbuster suit, while bosses include Vigo The Carpathian and the Stay Puft Marshmallow man.

ALIENS TC

★ The TC stands for Total Conversion if you're wondering. It's a PWAD that replaces virtually all the resources of the original with new ones. The result is an impressively accurate adaptation of the film, featuring key scenes and a host of recognisable weapons and beasties.

BATMAN

★ Another total conversion and another mod based on an extremely popular existing franchise. It's notable for having a huge number of recognisable bosses that range from Killer Croc and The Joker to Bane and Penguin. While Batman was created for *Doom 2*, we've played it via *Ultimate Doom* just fine.

STAR WARS DOOM

★ There are a number of *Star Wars* mods available, but we've a soft spot for this one. It has lots of samples from the film, a huge number of weapons that are extremely satisfying to use, a great reproduction of the iconic theme tune and lots of stormtroopers to kill. Impressive, most impressive.

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it could be shared, reaching countless other people who would in turn share it with their own friends. It created an amazing distribution system that required very little effort from id's 12-strong team.

■■■ And yet it wasn't just *Doom*'s accessibility that made it such a success. It was an incredibly good game, building on the blueprints that John Carmack and the rest of his team had first experienced with *Wolfenstein 3D* and polishing every aspect of it until it shone. *Doom* was light years ahead of the competition from a technical point of view, boasting all sorts of incredible little touches. Full texture mapping, enhanced lighting, rooms of different heights and stairways were just a few of the improvements over *Wolfenstein*, and they allowed for the creation of some incredibly atmospheric levels.

It also helped that the level design in *Doom* was exemplary. *Wolfenstein 3D* often felt that there was little thought to the structure of each stage (made more confusing by the lack of a map); however, the stages of *Doom* had a purpose and really gave you the impression that you were storming through a complex while fighting off the hordes of Hell. And what demonic monstrosities they were. Grotesque, robot spider hybrids, resurrected marines, flame-

KEY FACTS

■ The original *Doom* programming team consisted of John Carmack, John Romero, Mike Abrash and Dave Taylor.

■ *Doom* has crossed over into numerous forms of media. Comic books, novels, a board game and a movie starring The Rock have all been released.

■ The original version of *Doom* comprised three nine-level episodes. A fourth episode was added for the release of *Ultimate Doom* in 1995.

■ 10 December 2013 marked the 20th anniversary of *Doom*'s release. Various ports would arrive for several years after.

throwing imps and disgusting cacodemons were just a few of the monsters you faced. Fortunately, your nameless marine was more than capable of dealing with Hell's minions, having access to an array of devastating weapons that ranged from metallic knuckle dusters and a chainsaw to a double-barrelled shotgun and room-clearing BFG 9000.

The huge number of satanic creatures found in the game and the many bloodthirsty ways in which you could dispatch them saw *Doom* constantly courted by controversy, culminating in the infamous Columbine High School Massacre in 1999, when it was discovered that Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, the duo behind the massacre, had played the game extensively. *Doom* was still banned in Germany as late as 31 August 2011, almost 18 years after its original release, with the panel revealing that it was concerned that "the story played out in *Doom* involved a relentless cycle of gunplay and 'bloody sadistic' violence directed against humans or human-like beings". The same reasons that made it so popular with gamers in the first place.

It wasn't just violence that made id's game so appealing. Networked multiplayer gaming helped establish the now massively popular deathmatch, while the ability to customise and enhance *Doom*'s levels via the use of custom-built WAD files (which stood for Where's All The Data?) ensured that the game's future was only limited by a player's imagination. Sequels and clones quickly followed in the wake of the behemoth that id had created and it's gone on to appear on countless different platforms. It may be 20 years old now, but it remains as fresh as the day it was conceived, delivering an exhilarating slice of hardcore blasting that few of its later peers have managed to match.

> ## DOOM WAS LIGHT YEARS AHEAD OF THE COMPETITION FROM A TECHNICAL POINT OF VIEW

DOOM
THE CONVERSIONS

DOOM PROVED IMMENSELY POPULAR WITH GAMERS, AND AS A RESULT IT WAS PORTED TO A HUGE NUMBER OF DIFFERENT HOME SYSTEMS. HERE ARE THE MOST INTERESTING ONES

SEGA 32X (1994)
■ WHILE IT'S ENJOYABLE enough, it has quite a few omissions when compared to the PC game. The biggest omission is that it doesn't feature the third episode, which means the BFG 9000 is nowhere to be seen. It suffers from a weak soundtrack, loses a lot of sound effects and lacks most of the bigger monsters from the game. As with many other console versions it's impossible to circle-strafe, meaning its gameplay isn't as slick as it could be.

ATARI JAGUAR (1994)
■ ONE OF THE few trump cards in the Jaguar's library. It's the only home console port at the time that was actually coded by Carmack himself – and it shows. Amazing lighting effects, a super-fast pace and modified maps all help it stand apart, and it enables you to immediately select any weapon at will (the only console version to do so). The decision to map strafing to a single fire button hurts its mobility somewhat, though.

3DO (1995)
■ THE 3DO PORT of *Doom* promised to be spectacular and was based on the Atari Jaguar version. Despite the impressive grunt of the 3DO, it turned out to be an incredibly rushed port that failed to capture the magic of the original. Its biggest issues are the tiny available windows (although two bigger options are available with cheats) and an extremely choppy frame rate when using those bigger screen options.

SNES (1995)
■ THE SOUNDTRACK FOR this 16-bit port still sounds fantastic. Unfortunately, SNES *Doom* suffers in many other areas. While it's powered by the SuperFX2 chip, the graphics are very disappointing, with many enemies hard to see when they're in the distance. Add in an erratic frame rate and the lack of circle-strafing and SNES *Doom* is highly disappointing. It did manage to include the cyberdemon and spiderdemon though, so that's good.

PLAYSTATION (1995)

■ THIS IS WIDELY considered to be the best console port and it's hard to argue otherwise, especially as it includes *Doom 2* as well. It's an enhanced version of the Jaguar game with brighter visuals and a slicker pace. It moves at blistering speeds, putting the original to shame. All monsters (barring the Arch-vile) appear, but not in the same numbers as the PC versions.
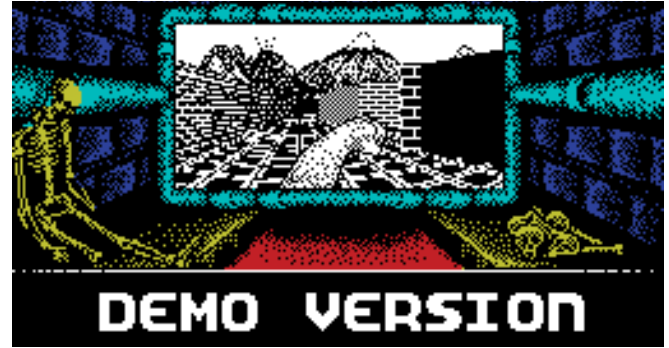

ZX SPECTRUM (1996)

■ OKAY, SO IT'S not an official port, but we can't not mention this astonishing effort. Created for the Spectrum 128K by Russian developer Digital Reality, it's an insanely impressive piece of work, even if it does run at a slow pace. It's also worth mentioning the superb music that plays throughout. It's obviously lacking when compared to the original, but it still manages to impress.

SEGA SATURN (1997)

■ CONSIDERING HOW GREAT *Quake* is on Saturn, *Doom* is a massive disappointment. It suffers from all sorts of issues, ranging from an extremely choppy frame rate to sluggish controls. It's a port of the PlayStation version, but loses a lot of the slick lighting effects that made it look so moody. The Japanese version of the game is widely considered to be the best version due to slightly better optimisation, but it's still a poor effort.

GAME BOY ADVANCE (2001)

■ THIS SLICK LITTLE GBA release is based on the early console ports, so it's a surprisingly faithful version. It's still missing the same monsters, has green blood, enemy corpses that quickly disappear and numerous other little differences, but it plays well enough. There's still no circle-strafing, but it does boast eight new deathmatch levels. It's worth noting, though, that multiplayer (and packed levels) does cause the game to run extremely slowly.

XBOX 360 (2006)

■ THIS IS ONE of the most authentic versions of *Doom*, although this is hardly surprising when you consider the power of the machine that it runs on. It's effectively *Ultimate Doom*, meaning you get all four episodes. It also features four-screen local multiplayer, built-in Achievements, online leaderboards, online multiplayer and slower music. It's an otherwise superb adaptation of the game and is currently available for just £1.99.

iOS (2009)

■ DESPITE THE FACT that he runs id Software, John Carmack still likes to keep his coding fingers dirty. The end result is this interesting release for iOS, which is an accomplished piece of work (as you'd expect from one of *Doom*'s creators) boasting all the beasties and levels from the original. There's a concession however, and it's a big one: *Doom* is basically a nightmare to play on touchscreen, even with a number of helpful options.

INTERVIEW

JOHN ROMERO

games™ speaks to the man behind some of the most revered works in the industry, who helped to establish the most dominant genre in gaming

The world of computer gaming has numerous prodigal sons, world changers and borderline rock stars, yet few can justifiably claim to be all three. With a career spanning more than 30 years, a number of highs and lows along the way and a portfolio full of titles any game designer would kill to have been a part of, John Romero fits the bill perfectly. games™ speaks to one of the minds responsible for death matches, e-sports, the decades-long dominance of first-person shooters and, unfortunately, *Daikatana...*

■ The technology may change, but the hair remains the same.

Tell us a bit about young John Romero and early life for you.

I grew up largely in northern California in a little town called Rocklin, and I was totally addicted to arcade games, like pretty much everyone who was a kid back then. I moved to Rocklin in 1976, but even before then I was living in Tucson, Arizona, and I used to play pinball all the time before the pinball places changed into videogame arcades. I remember playing a lot of the electro-mechanical games like *Dune Buggy*. When I was in California I played every game that came out. As soon as something new arrived I played it because I was in the arcades almost every day. I can remember the first time I saw certain games, like *Donkey Kong* or *Pac-Man*, or even *Targ*. Remember, as a 10 or 11-year-old kid you need quarters to play these games, [I didn't] have a job or parents with tons of money, so I had a paper route I'd deliver every morning. I was basically making $250 a month delivering papers, and using all that money on arcades.

That's a lot of quarters!

Yeah! That definitely fuelled some of the $1 billion worth of quarters that *Pac-Man* made in 1980!

Was it all arcades? What about early computer gaming?

Well, in the summer of 1979 my friend and my brother rode their bikes to the house and told me 'Oh my God, you won't believe it –

> **QUAKE DID NOT BURN BRIDGES BETWEEN PEOPLE OTHER THAN BETWEEN JOHN CARMACK AND MYSELF**

we found a way to play games that doesn't cost any money!' and I'm like 'Where is this place?' We all took our bikes and rode up to the college, which was about three miles away and went to the computer lab. Inside there were all these terminals connected to a giant machine in the next room, which was an HP9000 mainframe.

CAREER HIGHLIGHT
FORMING ION STORM

■■■ In November 1996, Romero, having left id Software after the release of *Quake*, formed another game development company with the slogan 'Design Is Law' as its guiding principle. Along with long-time friend and colleague Tom Hall and industry veteran Warren Spector, the eventually ill-fated Ion Storm would produce both critical hits and misses, with a catalogue that included the likes of *Deus Ex*, *Daikatana* and *Thief: Deadly Shadows*.

The guys there said, 'Yeah, we have different games here, but they're free because you just run them and they'll come up on the screen.' They showed the games they had, including *Adventure*, which was the best one out of all the games there. They also had things like *Poison Cookie*, *NIM* and *Hunt The Wumpus* – but *Adventure* was the greatest. There was a book there called *101 BASIC Computer Games* by David Ahl, and all of those games were on that mainframe. I played all of these games and found it very interesting how these were all very different to the arcade machines because they didn't have graphics – they all used letters and there was no time pressure. To me this was a huge revelation, because I wasn't pressured to hurry up and I could take my time, so that was a little bit of game design exposure that I found interesting.

And that is how you started out making your own games?

Yeah, for the next two years I was going to that college and trying to write little games and save them out on punch cards with paper tape and just learn more. I'd ask the college students, 'What word is this?' or 'How do I do this thing?' and so they would just tell me, and I built my vocabulary just from asking questions, because I didn't have any of my own books on it. Then in the summer of 1980 the college filled a room with Apple IIs, and when I saw that I was like, 'Whoa, colour and sound! I don't care about any other computers now!' I already knew a little bit about BASIC at that time, so now I was learning about the specifics of the Apple II, and if for some reason I couldn't get to the college then I'd go to a computer store and play on an Apple II there, or go to Radio Shack and use a TRS-80. I was so interested in computers that I would sit at the Radio

Shack for hours typing out a program from a type-in book just to see what would happen, and I'd start modifying it to see how it all worked. I spent so much time on this that my dad recognised that maybe I had something, so he got me my own Apple II, and that was like a rocket going off. As soon as I got that, that was it – I lived on that computer at home. Up until then I lived a normal kid's life – you know, going outside, blowing things up, getting up to crazy stuff, until that computer came – then it was over. I was on that thing all the time, playing everything I could and making lots of games. By the end of 1982 I was halfway through my sophomore year at high school and had created my own little games company, Capitol Ideas Software.

Much of id Software's popularity revolves around the company's first-person shooters, but what can you tell us about developing the *Commander Keen* series?

Well, John Carmack had just started with Softdisk, and the first game we did was a vertical-scrolling *Xevious* clone called *Slordax*. When I saw he was doing this I could see it was great, even though I was not so excited about vertical scrolling. I was more excited about horizontal scrolling because that would let us do platform games. We got that first game done and he began experimenting with the more advanced stuff one could do with the graphics card, and he stayed up with Tom Hall until 5am one night, put together a demo and copied it on a disk and put it on my computer. I came in the next day, I think it was 18 September 1990. I put the disk in, thinking "Ah-ha, they must have

CAREER HIGHLIGHT THE DAIKATANA FIASCO

■■■ One of the most notorious commercial failures in gaming history, John Romero's *Daikatana* suffered from a number of major issues when it was eventually released almost three years behind schedule. Romero's passion for the modding community saw him hire an entire team who had never made a game before – something which he admits was his biggest mistake. Yet it was the marketing of the game that most people remember: a bright red ad with the words 'John Romero is about to make you his bitch'. "That was not my idea," said Romero. "That was Mike Wilson, who was in marketing. That was a pretty bad thing to do, to put that out there. I never talk like that when I'm deathmatching. I don't call people my bitch, you know? I call them names!"

done something cool last night!" I ran the demo, and it looked like a replicated *Super Mario 3* level from the NES, but running on a PC. And it was on demo mode, so as soon as the character started running around and the screen scrolled it was perfectly smooth. I was like 'Oh my god…' I couldn't work for the next three hours!

Now onto *Wolfenstein 3D*… When that came out it just blew everyone out of the water.
We were all brainstorming one day for the next game to make, and I said 'Why don't we just redo *Castle Wolfenstein* in 3D?' Me, Carmack and Tom Hall were all major *Castle Wolfenstein* freaks, so that was it. We were going 'Can you imagine killing Nazis in 3D? There's no game like that!' One thing people don't really know is that the game ran at 70fps because the video controllers of the time ran at 70fps, unlike today, where they're mostly working at 60. So all of the technology behind it was built in four months, from January to April 1992, it was released on 5 May 1992 and the response was just massive. Like, *Commander Keen*'s sales were a joke compared to *Wolfenstein*. That first month we sold 4,000 copies and were doing phone interviews, and the local news came over and videoed the team. We really knew we were onto something – this 3D, violent thing is huge! [laughs]

■ An early game design from 1983 by a 15-year-old John Romero.
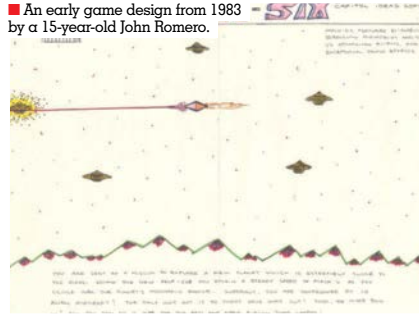
***Quake* was not only one of your greatest achievements, but it also shattered apart the team that had built all these great games. What can you say about that?**
It's pretty crazy. I guess it kind of goes to show that we were extremely intense in our efforts to make that game, and that intensity carried on for a year and

> **WE REALLY KNEW WE WERE ONTO SOMETHING… THIS 3D, VIOLENT THING IS HUGE!**

a half. That was 50 per cent longer than we'd ever spent making a game before. It was very hard, working in the same room every day, seven days a week, and when the game came out, half the company left. Even towards the end of the game, American McGee didn't even show up for work for the last month because he was just broken. Everybody was just done, and I was done too. The only

■ *Quake* revolutionised the world of 3D gaming, but shattered id Software in the process.

friendship that got affected by that was between Carmack and myself. Everyone else, we're all still friends, and whatever happened in the past is all forgiven, and I'd work with any of them again in an instant. *Quake* did not burn bridges between people other than between John and myself. Other than that, everyone else has gotten along pretty well.

What occurred with you and Carmack?
In 1995, when I wasn't working directly on *Quake*, and John was working really hard on it, I was busy with all the other stuff in the company. *Heretic* had just come out, and I was dealing with that, as well as the development of *Hexen* with Raven. There was also the re-release of *Doom* to retail, the amount of things going on was huge, and I was the only one doing these things, and I think John didn't feel like I put enough into *Quake*. I was building the level editor with John so that all of the level designers could build levels, and I kind of waited until the engine was ready to make the game. It took about a year to get to that point, and so I think that he was mad because I wasn't on the game like he was on the game. I think that upset him, and it could have gotten fixed if we had reorganised the company into an engine development team and a game development team. If we could have carried on making games in the *Doom* engine and then when the *Quake* engine was ready switched over to that, that would have been an optimal strategy for the company, but we did not really analyse the problem back then. All we really knew was how to work on the game together. Looking back, I believe that was a mistake.

Is there one project that you look back on that you're most proud of? Do you have a favourite child, so to speak?
Oh, *Doom*, definitely. It was so much fun to make. We were hitting on all cylinders and it just was the perfect game at the right time, and the right team working on it. It just all worked perfectly, and even though we worked really hard making it, it was the most fun hard work ever.
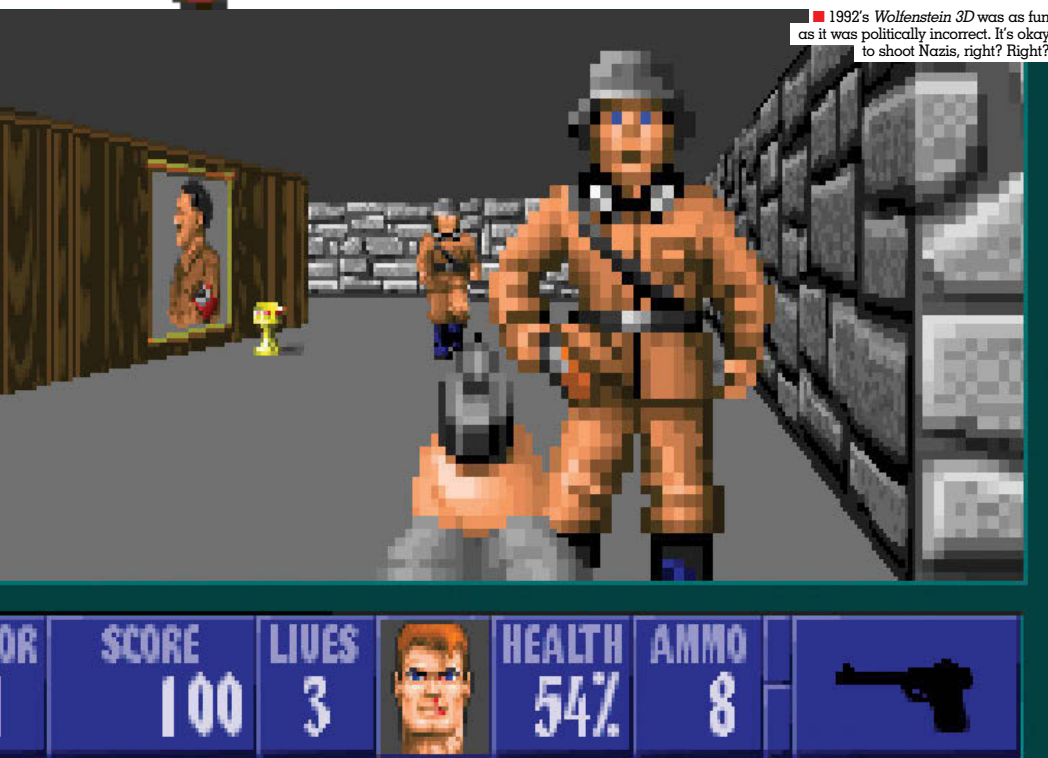
■ 1992's *Wolfenstein 3D* was as fun as it was politically incorrect. It's okay to shoot Nazis, right? Right?

SCORE 100 LIVES 3 HEALTH 54% AMMO 8

151 200% 2 3 4 5 6 7

AMMO   HEALTH   ARMS

[body end]

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"..."

[END]

200%

ARMOR

BULL 151 / 200
SHEL 50 / 50
RCKT 25 / 50
CELL 231 / 300

Long before Enemy Territory, Team Arena and planet of the Strogg, there was the game that started it all. **games™** takes id Sofware's **Tim Willitts** back to a time of Slipgates, Shamblers and Shub-Niggurath to discuss his work on Quake, what he feels the first true 3D first-person shooter did for the industry, and how likely it is that id Software will ever work on a direct follow-up...

AFTERSHOCKS

WHEN ASKED WHAT, in his opinion, is the key tenet to running a successful games developer, Tim Willits replies immediately. "It's important to have people that have that built-in, institutionalised level design knowledge."

But then, Willits probably would say that. Level design, after all, got him to where he is today; from bedroom coder to creative director of a first-person shooter developer that's now entered its 20th successful year at the forefront of the games industry. For Willits, life before joining the company, as he reminded everybody assembled at the recent annual QuakeCon gathering, when fans and wellwishers piled to id's native Texas to play deathmatch for a whole weekend, was little more than a daydream about, one day, working for id.

"I was the original mod community hire," reflects Willits, who was originally recruited on the strength of the standout *Doom* levels he created as a fan, and which came to the attention of John Romero through the game's burgeoning mod scene.

While the other id staffers were busy working on their ambitious foray into full 3D, which would soon become *Quake*, Willits cut his teeth working on a few levels for 1995's *The Ultimate Doom*; a re-release of the first game to try and pull in new players between *Doom II* and the release of the new project. Lean, expansive and significantly more punishing than many of *Doom* or *Doom II*'s standard levels, Willits' contributions proved extremely popular. He was soon pushed onto the next project, finding himself with the relative honour of designing over two thirds of what would become *Quake*'s free shareware episode; the set of levels that would announce the game to the world, and encourage its players to hand over money for the rest of it. As the game met massive success, Willits remembers the feeling of surfing the crest of the wave *Quake* sent through gaming culture.

"People disagree with me, but I believe that *Quake* was more influential to the industry than *Doom* was," he says. "Because *Quake* did things that

dedicated web pages to gaming; competitive, online gaming. Clan server architecture that everybody uses, the true, 3D nature of games. I mean, heck, there are still people to this day that are known more to their friends by their *Quake* name than their real name. I mean, *Doom* was huge; don't get me wrong. But I think *Quake* did more good."

There's one particular aspect of the rise of *Quake*'s deathmatch angle (deathmatch, incidentally, being a word John Romero himself invented in the *Doom* era) that Willits personally brought to the party. It's hugely notable due to the level of criticism it received from his peers which, in hindsight, sounds astonishing.

"This is me just tooting my own horn here," smiles Willits, "I'm being bad. But... dedicated deathmatch maps. We were done with the *Quake* stuff, and I went to John [Romero] and John [Carmack] to tell them, and I said, 'Hey, I got this idea. We have all these map fragments...' because the [design] guys hadn't worked them into the maps, and they'd been abandoned. I said 'Let me take these map fragments; we can work with them and make them deathmatch-only maps. And Romero told me that was the stupidest idea he'd ever heard. 'Why in a million years would anyone want to make a deathmatch-only map, when you can make a single-player map and you can play deathmatch on it? It's dumb. Don't make a deathmatch map.'

"So yes," he concludes. "I was told that deathmatch-only maps were dumb. By both John Romero and John Carmack."

It feels like one of those pivotal moments in history when, had Willits backed down or been overturned, the fate of a whole industry within an industry

Tim Willitts
id software

"I WAS TOLD THAT
DEATHMATCH-ONLY
MAPS WERE DUMB.
BY BOTH JOHN ROMERO
AND JOHN CARMACK"

-Tim Willitts

'The greatest deathmatch map ever made'

■ ASKED WHICH OF the hundreds of maps he's designed Tim Willits is most proud of, his answer leaves his lips before the question's even finished. "The Edge, for *Quake II*," he says.

Quake II's deathmatch map is a classic, a high-walled courtyard overlooked by a ledge that begs to have grenades thrown down at combatants below. The all-important rocket launcher lies in a long alleyway with a dead-end, making a return with the prize a gauntlet of risk. Out back, an open wasteland is the perfect setting for railgun duels once the weapon's been rescued from a hidden underground pool. The map is ripe for exploits and derring-do.

"I only designed three triple-jumps into that map, and there's 76 triple-jumps you can do," explains Willits. "*Three* were designed, but... 76! It's amazing." What Willits is referring to is a phenomena unique to *Quake II*, similar to rocket jumping, which let players exploit the character's jumping animations to perform 'bunny hop' double- or triple-jumps. The fact players have managed to traverse it in ever-more interesting and fluid ways is testament the freeform nature of the map.

"Go to The Edge," says Willits. "Greatest deathmatch map ever made!"

could have been swayed. No Blood Gulch for *Halo*, perhaps. No *Modern Warfare* map packs. *Quake III Arena* itself, by its very point and nature, may never have happened.

■■■ Dedicated deathmatch wasn't the only feature tacked on due to happy accident, either. However, the other major innovation *Quake* brought to the multiplayer field was so hardwired into the code that it was too late to do anything; its bittersweet discovery simply had to be chalked down to experience, and learned from in future games development.

"John Cash [a programmer on *Quake*] was the father of the rocket jump," states Willits. We were playing deathmatch on the start map of *Quake*, and he picked up some armour, because me and American [McGee] were chasing him down this corridor, and there are dead ends, and John Cash was like, 'Fuck you guys – if I'm dying, you're dying too'. He looks down, pulls the trigger and goes jump – *boom!* – and survives. And we're like, 'What did you do?' and rocket jumping was born that day."

At a medium-to-heavy cost of player health (the more expertly timed the jump, the higher you would be propelled), a player could leap into the air while firing a rocket straight into the floor beneath them. The effect would add momentum to catapult them to seven times the height of a standard jump. The problem – as widely shown in speed run videos such as the infamous '*Quake* Done Quick', which clocks the whole 30-map game in under 11 minutes – is that this unforetold element more or less broke many of *Quake*'s levels.

"We never really thought of it," admits Willits. "And we discovered it too late, and also we never thought it would be so impactful to the game. But then people went rocket jumping over maps, or into the ceiling."

The reason a commonly-held belief exists that it was the players themselves who discovered rocket jumping is, says Willits, because id thought it best to simply keep quiet about the whole thing. "We didn't announce it," he grins. "We had clip rushes [QA testing phases where the ceiling was tested for its permeability], but in *Quake II* we clip-rushed the shit out of the ceiling!"

In time, rocket jumping would be fully integrated into future games, many of *Quake II* and *Quake III: Arena*'s maps designed specifically to feature them, and absolutely never to rule them out. But it's telling

IT WAS A RANDOM COLLECTION OF RANDOM DUDES MAKING RANDOM SHIT THAT RANDOMLY WORKED

of how far the genre has progressed that Willits, for the first time in id game history, plans to firmly sway this tradition in the team's upcoming title. "In *Quake*, your own splash damage [from a rocket] was 50 per cent, and that's always been the case, but for *Rage* I was like, 'You take 100 per cent'. So, no rocket jumping. You can rocket *move*, but you'll obviously die. I was there when rocket jumping was born, and I was there when I killed it!"

The sense of happy accident that seemed to punctuate the development of *Quake*, Willits would say, truly carried into every aspect of its creation, more care and consideration taken to crafting a fun and functional bare-bones shooter than on anything with a semblance of sense. "We had no idea what we were doing!" he exclaims. "It was a random collection of random dudes making random shit that randomly worked."

■ Like *Doom*, *Quake*'s monsters fight between themselves if they get caught in crossfire. While there aren't as many monsters around as in *Doom*, and thus the player-engineered bloodbaths are never quite as satisfying, it's still a fun way to save ammo.

■ This is a particularly well-known rocket jump on *Quake* Episode 1's Gloom Keep, the successful performance of which can easily skip a vast portion of the level.
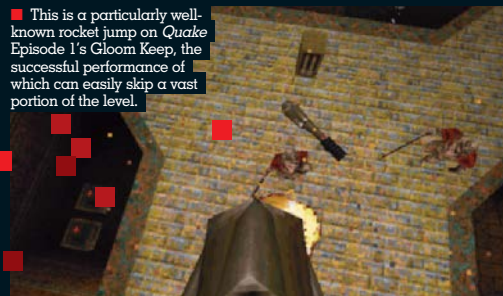
But the world, Willits concedes, proved a unique and popular one. Combining fantastical geometry of *Doom*'s often physically impossible worlds with all the architectural truths that a genuine 3D world demanded, *Quake*'s environments were famously gloomy, Lovecraftian affairs; dark medieval grottos and fortresses filled with rusted spike traps, imposing battlements and slavering, sharp-jawed beasts, fur matted with blood, roaming the corridors without any purpose or goal other than killing the player. It's easy to interpret *Quake* as "random", but it came from a time when plot, poise and realistically modelled Middle Eastern warzones weren't a necessity for a shooter. Is it a fanastical motif gamers, tired by the samey nature of modern military shooters, might be ready to return to?

■■■ "It would be fun..." comments Willits, carefully, "But we have no plans! Nothing in the works, I promise. But there would be an awesome announcement trailer, wouldn't there?" Willits begins to paint the air in front of him with his hands. "You see this rust, right? And you're moving along this rust, then you hear a sound like a Shambler or something, and then 'Shhboom!' the rusty *Quake* logo. That's all there is. And that's just a trailer. That would be *awesome*."

Times have changed, of course, and in reality a new *Quake* would be a tall order. id Software is now a games developer much, bureaucratically, like many others. Bought out by *Elder Scrolls* publisher Zenimax in 2009, it now has a 160-strong team of coders, artists and level designers. This is compared to the 11 or so staff who put *Quake* together in 1996. It's even a suitably massive leap beyond the 33 who built *Doom 3* some eight years later. "Well, you know we have two teams working on *Doom 4*?" Willits casually asks, before refusing to answer even the smallest question about the long-awaited sequel.

The difference, perhaps, to other studios of such vintage is that id's continued existence is about much more than just its name and IP. Founding, or some very earliest recruited, members are still there and, though many are now directors, they're all often actively engaged in development.

"The core group is still pretty small," says Tim Willits. "You know, Hooper [Matt, id's Design Director], me, Robert Duffy, Jan Paul [van Waveren, programmer], Jerry Keehan [senior designer] and those guys, and we still try to keep it flat. We've got a much bigger tools team, and a bigger port-coding team; we

Keeping the engine running

■ THE QUAKE ENGINE, even taking into account John Carmack's staunch outlook on sharing the source code for his game engines when they become outmoded or obsolete, has still become particularly ubiquitous in videogame design.

Quite apart from being ported as *Quake* and *Quake II* to the PlayStation, Saturn, Nintendo 64 and even Amiga (ported by Canadian company clickBoom in 1998, four years after the demise of Commodore), there are remnants, according to a blog of John Carmack's in 2004, of the code still housed in Valve's Source engine, the predecessor of which – GoldSrc – was a direct offshoot of the first *Quake* engine.

Ports continue to this day, with id's own *Quake Live* being a semi-web-based version of *Quake III Arena*, and a particularly impressive homebrew port of *Quake* currently available for Nintendo DS. Please only play legally, though, and bring your own PAK files.

■ *Quake*'s final boss, Shub-Niggurath, is one of its most direct references to H.P Lovecraft, its name and design heavily reminiscent of one of the author's most celebrated creatures.

have a dedicated PS3 guy, a dedicated 360 guy and stuff. But the core dudes are still the core guys. You know, John Carmack is in work every day, and still programmes. He comes in the office and says, 'There's too much latency', and then he'll hit a button in the game and say, 'This button comes up too slow, you have to cut frames out of it.' John still does that stuff, which is awesome."

Willits himself, despite the responsibilities he now carries at id, can't seem to keep from getting his hands dirty, either.

"Hooper and I are both level designers by nature," he says. "There's still some times when I'll get a pencil, and draw stuff up for folks. But, unfortunately I do much less of that than I used to. Which is sad."

"But what's nice about having a creative director and a design director, with Hooper, that started off as level designers... because level designers are where the rubber meets the road. I mean, everything goes. It doesn't matter how great your art is or how tricky your programmers are, it all comes down to the level design. I guess programmers would say that's not true, but it's true."

GOLDENEYE 007

Released: 1997 **Publisher:** Nintendo **Developer:** Rare **System:** Nintendo 64

GoldenEye became the N64's third best selling game of all time, with incredible critical acclaim and multiplayer appeal contributing to its 8 million sales.

More than just a movie tie-in, Rare's seminal first-person shooter rewrote the genre playbook and provided Nintendo's console with a multiplayer classic

ARRIVING DURING THE golden age of first-person shooters, Rare's *GoldenEye 007* stood out from the overcrowded PC scene, landing on Nintendo's doorstep in 1997 on a wave of critical hype and acclaim. Until this point, many dismissed console platforms as unsuited to first-person shooters, instead sitting behind their PCs engrossed in *Doom*, *Quake* and *Wolfenstein*. *GoldenEye* arrived with an appropriate bang, highlighting consoles as a viable FPS platform for the first time and contributing significantly to the Nintendo 64's appeal.

With Martin Hollis in the director's chair, the game was moulded by the same prolific collective that would be responsible for *Perfect Dark*, *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Conker's Bad Fur Day* further down the line. Rare was hitting heights that many developers would only dream of, and generated some of the best output of the Nineties. Members of the same team would later form Free Radical, responsible for the equally excellent *TimeSplitters* series.

From the more sedate beginnings of the Dam level right through to the dramatic conclusion atop a large satellite array, *GoldenEye* took you on a monumental journey, fighting your way through Soviet control centres, the streets of St Petersburg, the jungles of Cuba and what looks strangely like a reclamation site. The world that Rare built was a potent influence on first-person shooters that followed, and represented the first mainstream FPS with a truly international feel.

The film, released two years earlier, obviously influenced the game's design. Hollis and his team – thanks to the 64-bit power of Nintendo's machine – managed to achieve high levels of fidelity compared to the bog-standard output of the big movie licensing boom of the Eighties. Never before had there been a licensed game based on a movie that looked so much like its counterpart, and there haven't been many since then that have been as successful creatively or mechanically. Rare had access to set plans while developing, and due to this you can enjoy direct parallels with the film. It is still a joy to this day to jump from the dam at the end of the first level, for example – If you know the film, you'll be aware that it begins with Bond running and then performing the iconic bungie jump. In the game, however, there is an entire Russian compound that must be infiltrated

FOR ENGLAND, JAMES | GOLDENEYE OFFERED A DEEPER EXPERIENCE THAN MANY OF ITS PC COMPETITORS WITH THESE ELEMENTS

Aztec Complex, Teotihuaca'n

IMAGINATION

★ Martin Hollis and his team used the movie as a strong basis for the action in the game, but were unafraid to extend and adapt certain sections to enhance the experience. From being able to drop down into the bathroom in Facility to fighting Jaws in an Aztec temple, *GoldenEye* offers a refreshing take on movie adaptations.

LEVEL DESIGN

★ Ask anyone who played *GoldenEye* back in 1997 where the hidden body armour is in Cradle or where the RC-P90 is in Train, and they'll be able to tell you in a heartbeat. Rare's levels are diverse and memorable, borrowing directly from the film and expanding neatly on locations that the film brushed over.

WEAPONRY

★ Even now in the midst of the largest FPS movement in history thanks to *Call Of Duty* and *Battlefield*, *GoldenEye*'s array of weapons still stands out. This is no more apparent than when the 'All Guns' cheat is enabled, which not only provides you with every variety of firearm available naturally, but extras like a nifty taser.

before then. It almost gives the sense that the film begins in medias res – that by playing the game you're actually seeing the whole picture.

This is true with later levels too, thrusting Bond (impressively rendered to resemble Pierce Brosnan) into scenarios that were either only touched upon in the movie or entirely built for purpose. There are encounters in the Severnaya computer complex that Bond never visits in the movie, instead watching the facility be destroyed by an EMP blast from the GoldenEye satellite. And after protecting Natalya in Trevelyan's control centre towards the end of the game, you pursue the former 006 through some labyrinthine water caverns before eventually encountering him on top of the satellite array, in contrast to the film's simple jaunt in an elevator.

This willingness to adapt culminates in two secret levels that can be accessed after you've completed the game on Secret Agent and 00 Agent difficulties respectively. These levels – Aztec and Temple – showed a wider knowledge of James Bond, pitting Bond against two old nemeses in the form of Jaws and Baron Samedi. The Golden Gun makes an

KEY FACTS

■ *GoldenEye* was intitialy intended to be an on-rails shooter in the same vein as *Virtua Cop* and *Time Crisis*, but thankfully this was reconsidered.

■ Several levels were designed with the film sets in mind. The best examples of these can be found at the end of the Dam level, the bathroom and bottling room in Facility, the interrogation and library areas of Archives, and the Cradle level where you fight Trevelyan.

■ It is actually possible to control the game using two controllers at once, allowing for first-person control similar to that which you would find nowadays.

appearance. The temple is based on *The Spy Who Loved Me*. Aztec is actually Hugo Drax's jungle base from *Moonraker*. It shows a true love for Bond that few games have ever managed, allowing the more fantastical and tongue-in-cheek elements of the franchise to creep in from time to time.

■■■ By adding non-linear objectives, Rare further broke the first-person shooter mould, tasking you with approaching levels in a more considered manner on higher difficulties. On Agent difficulty these objectives are fairly basic, but on Secret Agent and 00 Agent it became quite testing. What's interesting is the lack of hand holding – certain objectives are either hidden away or more technical in nature, requiring a higher level of care than *GoldenEye*'s FPS forbears.

It all purveys production values that weren't really found in first-person shooters at this time, and that's where you can easily connect the dots between *GoldenEye* and modern shooters like *Call Of Duty* and *Battlefield*. Protecting Natalya in the control room, pursuing Trevelyan in the Cradle level, rescuing hostages on board the frigate – these elements were unexpected from a licensed game in 1997, and are common tropes of the genre today.

But *GoldenEye*'s legacy isn't just found in contemporary first-person shooters; it represents an industry shift. Would we have such a huge FPS player base today if it wasn't for Rare's masterpiece? Probably, yes, but it's likely that it would have taken longer to catch on. It also arguably represents the pinnacle of movie licensing. *GoldenEye* is still prevalent in the hearts and minds of many players today, and for that it is worthy of respect, reassessment and, of course, a playthrough if you get the chance.

NEVER BEFORE HAD THERE BEEN A LICENSED GAME THAT LOOKED SO MUCH LIKE ITS COUNTERPART

GET AHEAD IN MULTIPLAYER

WE MAY BE AROUND 17 YEARS TOO LATE TO THE PARTY, BUT REGARDLESS, **GAMES™** IS ON HAND TO GUIDE YOU TO CERTAIN VICTORY IN GOLDENEYE MULTIPLAYER MODE
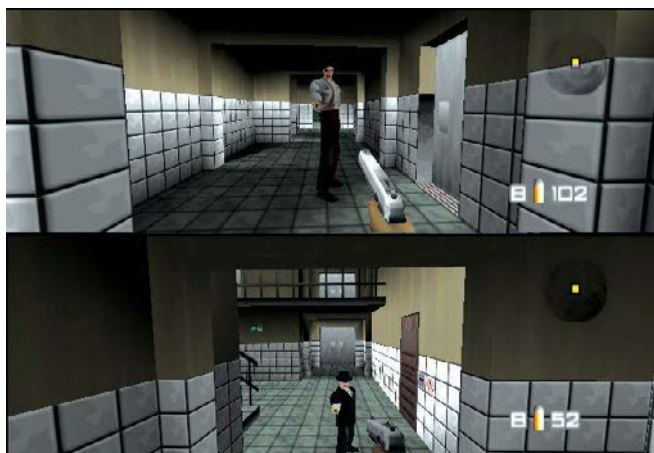
CHARACTER SELECT

■ The first step on the path to multiplayer success is carefully picking your character. It is worth noting that in some circles, selecting Oddjob is considered to be foul play, Auric Goldfinger's deadly yet diminutive henchman standing considerably shorter than other selectable characters. It's highly recommended that you avoid Jaws – as the tallest, and wearing a highly visible white shirt, he is easy to spot and hit. Try and pick a character that's a little more nondescript, such as Trevelyan, who stands at an average height and whose black clothing blends in nicely with the darker backdrops of some of the maps such as Temple and Caves.

LEARN YOUR MAPS

■ Much like any modern first-person shooter, learning *GoldenEye*'s map layouts is essential if you want to embarrass your friends at multiplayer. As well as getting to grips with the basic layouts, it's also worth noting where secret passages and hidey-holes are. Several of these secret pathways are key to success, such as the vents that can be walked through in Complex and the sliding walls that appear in Temple, Library, Basement and Archives. These are all useful for the stealthier player, but if you fancy being offensive-minded and fighting from a cover-based position, then get yourself up on the raised platforms in Complex.

ARMOUR UP
■ It's worth noting that body armour can be found on each of the maps, and finding it and occupying areas near it are surefire ways to get ahead. Refer to step two – body armour is usually located in hidden areas, and so try to be experimental as you traverse the maps. Body armour essentially doubles your health, and in a one-on-one firefight with an enemy it can be the decider.
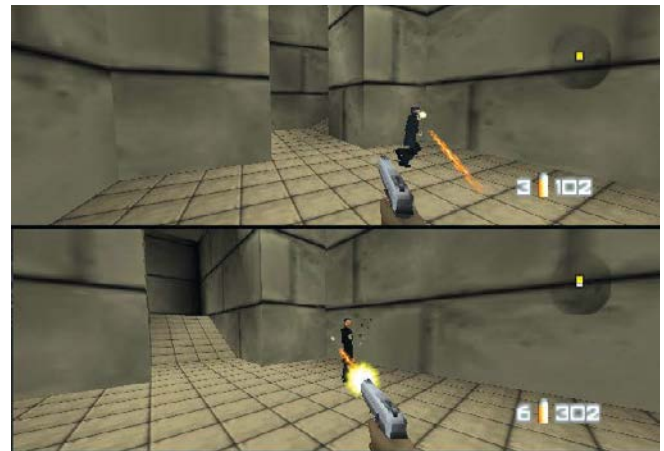
THE GOLDENEYE STRAFE
■ Never underestimate the power of the strafe. As far as techniques go this is imperative by holding the C-Left and C-Right buttons you can strafe with ease, making it much harder for your opponents to hit you. Try and be unpredictable; walking in a straight line is a very modern concept – get crazy with strafing and watch the bullets whizz harmlessly past you.

BE DISHONEST
■ When all else fails, just cheat. You're playing with friends after all – it's quite likely that they'll forgive you. To do this effectively, select Oddjob quickly and start the game before your opponents know what's happening. Alternatively, beat the game to unlock extra characters in advance, allowing you to select the Moonraker Elite – she is as short as Oddjob, and with a non-specific name, is easier to get away with.

   The key technique for robbing a win with any character, though, can be easily achieved once in the game. Hold down R to aim and then rock back with C-Down to crouch. From this position, it is near impossible for other players to hit you without using the cumbersome aim button or crouching themselves. Get down low, find the best weapon you can and then unleash Hell.

   Caught out doing both of the above? Don't worry; your greatest weapon is sight. Why waste your time looking at your own portion of the screen? Instead, you should be looking at every screen other than your own. No radar? No problem. If you've learned the maps well enough, a quick glance at an opponent's screen will enable you to ascertain their position and move in for the kill.

■ **Above:** Shorter characters always had the upper hands in a game of *GoldenEye*. With vertical aiming a concept that was relatively uncommon at the time, characters like Oddjob or Moonraker Elite were a fast track to success. **Below:** By much the same standard, crouching with a standard character was also a great way of frustrating your opponent.
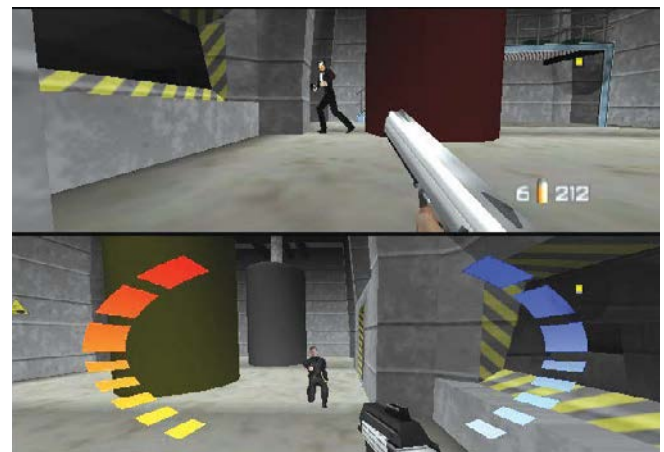
GOLDENEYE 007
Nintendo 64 [Rare] **1997**

■ SEAN BEAN couldn't have been massively impressed that his likeness was used to create a character that appeared to have Annie Lennox's face wrapped around a pineapple, but nevertheless his villainous Alec Trevelyan is one of the highlights of Rare's seminal N64 shooter. Trevelyan has almost a Jaws-like presence throughout *GoldenEye*'s exceptionally eclectic campaign, the evasive one-time 00-agent emerging for air on several occasions to goad Bond before disappearing once again into the ether. He's a suitably frustrating antagonistic figure, mirroring Bond's uncanny invulnerability to bullets, oversized arsenal and supercilious swagger right until the very end when the nippy bastard is chucked from the top of a colossal satellite. For England? No. This one's for us.

6 | 110

HALF-LIFE

Subtle and disturbing, slow-burning, terrifying and occasionally hilarious, Valve Software's Half-Life is one of the most influential videogames of all time. Crowbar in hand, games™ returns to the abandoned halls of Black Mesa to find out why
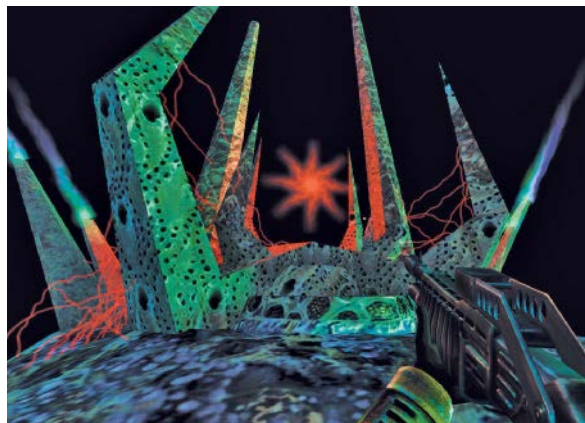
■ Despite its progressive gameplay, *Half-Life* still followed a couple of hackneyed gaming traditions.
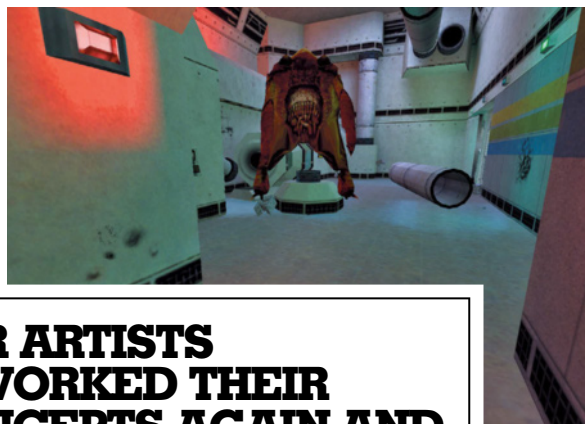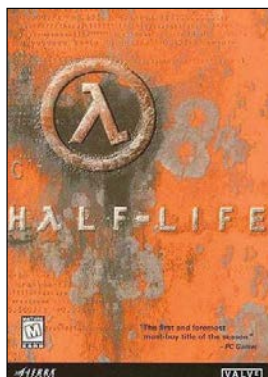
Released: 1998
Format: PC, PlayStation 2
Publisher: Sierra
Developer: Valve

KEY STAFF:
Gabe Newell
CEO
Marc Laidlaw
Writer
Ted Backman
Senior Artist
Ken Birdwell
AI Designer

IT COULD HAVE all gone so wrong. We know you hear that a lot in game retrospectives, but this is serious. Yes, *BioShock* could have been about zombies in a Nazi bunker, *Borderlands* could have looked like gruel, and *Tabula Rasa* might have featured butterfly-winged girly men fighting each other with books. (Then again, *Tabula Rasa* tanked, so maybe book-fighting girly men were the right way to go.) But *Half-Life* is more than just a game. It triggered a movement: a massive change not just in the way first-person shooters were made, but videogames as a whole. It set new standards for player immersion, narrative quality and combat AI, and opened the doors to modding in a more generous fashion than any other shooter had done before – in doing so, ultimately creating an unstoppable multiplayer phenomenon. In some ways, *Half-Life* is the most important game of the past two decades. And yet it might just have been a middling old *Quake* clone starring a guy called Ivan the Space Biker.

No, really. Ivan was a paunchy chap with a full beard and a flattop. He wore a bulky HEV suit and was, presumably, predisposed towards biking in or near space. One can only summon up that ever-mysterious *deus ex machina* known as 'the creative process' to justify how this blockily rendered slab of mid-Nineties cheese transformed into Gordon Freeman, the world's sexiest physicist, but there it is. Somewhere along the line, *Half-Life* went from embarrassing to exceptional. One of *Half-Life*'s designers, Marc Laidlaw, attempts to explain: "We didn't so much 'pick' the current image of Gordon as just naturally develop it. Our artists reworked their concepts again and again and again until they had something we liked, and Ivan was just one of those concepts." **CONTINUED >.**

OUR ARTISTS REWORKED THEIR CONCEPTS AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN

Though *Half-Life* evolved from the Quake engine, it moved the genre on much more than id's generic first-person shooter series ever did.

The crowbar, as our forumites succinctly point out, is one of *Half-Life*'s most memorable contributions to FPS lore.
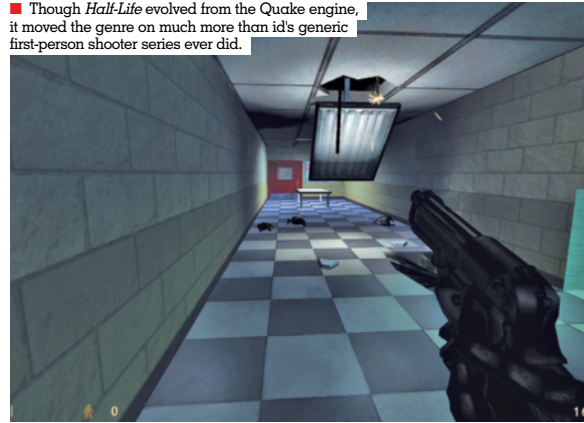
Posted by:
SWOOPER_D
◢ My first experience of it all after the opening train ride was constantly bothering everyone with the talk button. Must have heard those same lines about 20 times each…

Posted by:
BIG MEAN BUNNY
◢ Whilst the game was an incredible epic, the real memories for me were finding two little mods called *Counter-Strike* and *Team Fortress*. I had recently had my appendix out and was off school. I ran up a three-figure 'dial-up' bill as I'd been playing it for hours a day when you still used to pay by the minute before 6pm.

Posted by:
SHADOWMAN
◢ The opening train ride seemed to last forever and when it finally ended I managed to fall off the platform and kill myself, meaning I had to sit through the thing again. Oh yeah, and the game going from amazing to frustrating the second I stepped onto the alien planet.

Posted by:
KAR
◢ I think it was the narrative that was so memorable. We take it for granted now, a shooter having a storyline, but think back to 1998. The heavy-hitter FPSs were *Unreal*, *Quake II* and *Jedi Knight*. *Unreal* and *Quake II* had loose plots that were there merely to provide a pretext for the action. *Jedi Knight* had a rich plot, but it was driven by pre-rendered cut-scenes and felt as if they were a reward for playing the game, not intrinsic to the game itself.

Posted by:
SCOTSWAHEY
◢ Crowbar.

■ *Half-Life's* alien species somehow managed to look indistinct and iconic at the same time. That's good design.

One World

■ One of *Half-Life's* innovations that receives very little commentary these days is the seamless world in which it takes place. Prior to Valve's debut game, shooters followed the environment model pioneered in platform games, where each 'level' was a self-contained, visually distinct world. In *Half-Life*, apart from the bit where you do genuinely visit another planet, the world is rolled out contiguously. And the only interruption the player has to this unprecedented realism is the odd pause and on-screen 'Loading' message. It had the effect of making the Black Mesa Research Facility feel like an actual, real-world location – a rather worrying concept, when you think about it.

Such is the nature of early concepts, we suppose: those undercooked, malformed designs that so often unfortunately get foisted upon the gaming public due to tight production schedules. Luckily, however, Valve was self-funded by Microsoft vet and CEO Gabe Newell, who was more than happy to let his company's labour of love grow into its full potential. This culminated in a major overhaul fairly late into development, when the Valve team took stock of what they were building and decided it didn't stand a chance against *Quake II* and associates. "The game was fairly close to completion," Laidlaw recalls, "and we looked at it and realised that if it were to be released, it would be completely lost in any number of competing products. So they decided to risk pushing the game's release back and do a complete redesign. We weren't beholden to a publisher holding the purse-strings. There were lots of other extremely talented and creative shooter developers out there at the time, though, but I think it just comes down to our own interests and talents. That's why it was different."

While we'd be quite surprised if you've never played *Half-Life*, there's always the chance that a recent frontal lobe injury has rendered you unable to recall precisely what was so unique about it. Shall we start with the tram ride? Prior to *Half-Life*, shooters were devoid of context: there wasn't any sensible reason given to excuse/explain the mass murder the game would necessitate. For instance, when designers on the original *Doom* pitched a sequence to John Carmack where the player could watch his fellow marines enjoying a game of cards before being eviscerated by cybernetic hellspawn, he replied that "story in a game is like a story in a porn movie. It's expected to be there, but it's not that important."
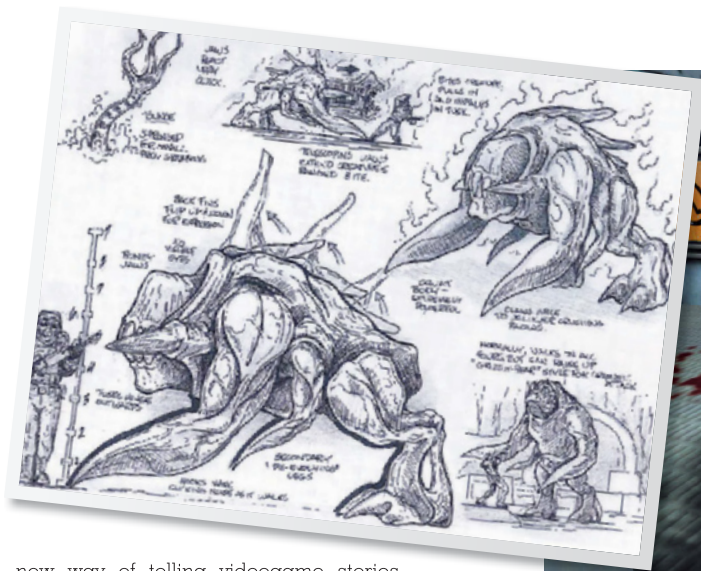
How, then, must Carmack have felt in those opening minutes of *Half-Life*, where the player is confined

to a tiny tram car, unable to do anything but shift from seat to seat, take in the underground view and listen to that valium-voiced female announcer? And after that, a solid ten-to-fifteen minutes of pure, weapon-free exploration within the Black Mesa Research Facility, where you do battle with such monstrosities as malfunctioning vending machines and shrill whitecoats reminding you you're late for work? Back in 1998, this wasn't just heresy: this was completely unthinkable.

■■■ IN THOSE OPENING minutes, *Half-Life* turned its back on the masturbatory excesses of its contemporaries, and in doing so set the tone for the rest of the game (and for all shooters to come, other than maybe *Serious Sam*). Exposition, hitherto relegated to cut-scenes or walls of perfunctory text *à la Doom*, took place completely from the player's eyes. This had the effect of seamlessly integrating *Half-Life's* plot with its shooting; story wasn't treated as a necessary evil or a reward for 20 hours of mindless killing; rather, it was just as integral to the game as the gunplay. "It was a radical change," Laidlaw agrees. "I played *Quake II* while we were doing *Half-Life*, and, sure enough, it starts with the player making his way out of a wrecked spaceship, blaster in hand. So, starting a shooter without giving the player a weapon, and then making the player explore an area completely devoid of threats for up to an hour, just wasn't done in other shooters at the time. It made me feel that we were taking a huge risk, and that *Half-Life* would be very different to anything else out there. But if it worked, I knew the rewards would be huge. We were all big fans of the FPS. It was, at least at the time, my favourite type of game, and one that seemed as if it would get the biggest benefit from the integration of storytelling techniques. There was a general arrogant assumption that players of shooters didn't want and wouldn't care about a story; we just didn't believe this."

Of course, due to *Half-Life's* player-centric modus operandi, Valve was required to create an entirely

STARTING A SHOOTER WITHOUT GIVING THE PLAYER A WEAPON JUST WASN'T DONE

■ An early concept design for Gordon Freeman. Thank God his design has been refined over the years since his conception.

Years of taking grenades from GoldenEye's scientists has left us feeling a little bitter.

new way of telling videogame stories. Because players were never saddled with two minutes of helpful pre-rendered dialogue warning them of the imminent alien security breach, or the arrival of the sadistic military unit flown in to clean it up, they relied on the frantic snippets of information that surviving Black Mesa scientists and security guards provided. *Half-Life*, thus, wasn't so much cinematic as realistic. It was the first game that felt genuinely real, albeit with added extraterrestrials and at a top-secret research facility into which us Cro-Magnon hominids could never dream of being invited. "For a lot of people," Laidlaw, who was the story's chief architect, notes, "Black Mesa was a real place. The story actually stemmed from our desire to make coherent a large amount of in-game levels, which we really did design with gameplay in mind. The levels were all quite different, though, so the story needed to give voice to a team of level designers who'd never worked together before and would be fairly independent of each other whilst still having a common goal in mind.

MARC LAIDLAW
Writer

■■■ "AFTER A WHILE, when the levels were getting closer to their finished state, we started fleshing out the story. But we really had one goal in mind from the beginning – to have as little obvious explanation in the game as was possible. Players had to be the detectives, putting the different pieces together themselves. From what we've seen over the years, Black Mesa made a huge impression on a generation of players as a result."

All this emphasis on story isn't to suggest *Half-Life* wasn't also a technical achievement, however. In order to create Black Mesa, Valve – not yet the developer-publisher godbeast able to afford its own graphics engine and Ireland to boot – was forced to drag the ageing Quake engine out of the excrement-hued morass for which it had become famous. With id bringing out their own sequel to *Quake* – and brand-new, Carmack-devised technology with it – and Epic MegaGames introducing the world to the soon-to-be-ubiquitous Unreal engine, competition was fierce, and perhaps a little daunting for the Bellevue-based newcomer. But GoldSrc, the engine created from Quake's ashes – and the modern-day Source engine's ancestor – proved more than up to the task.

"The biggest advantage in starting with the Quake engine," Laidlaw says, "was that we were allowed to get right into making the game, rather than spending several years building the engine technology first. A lot of our level designers were experienced Quake modders and mappers too, and understood the engine's shortcomings and strengths. CONTINUED >.
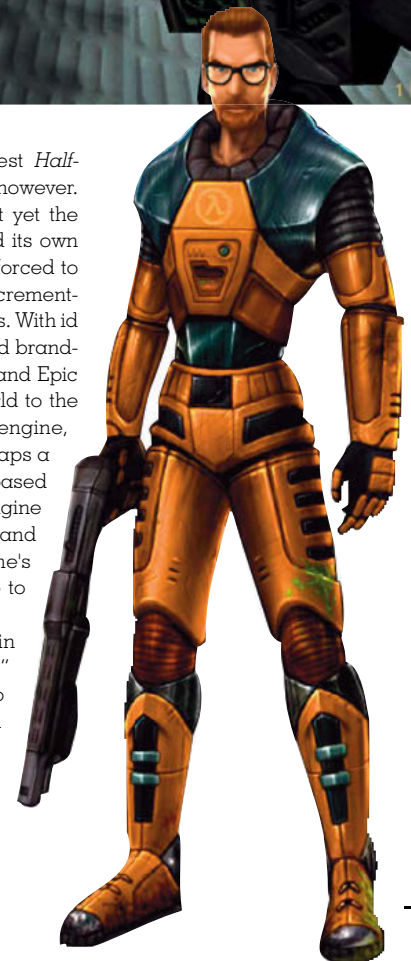
>. A GAMING EVOLUTION

Despite *Half-Life*'s sleek aesthetic being worlds away from dreary browns, *Quake* is the primary reason for *Half-Life*'s existence.

Everything Valve put into *Half-Life* is evident in the bestselling game of 2009, from the transparent player character to the scripted sequences.
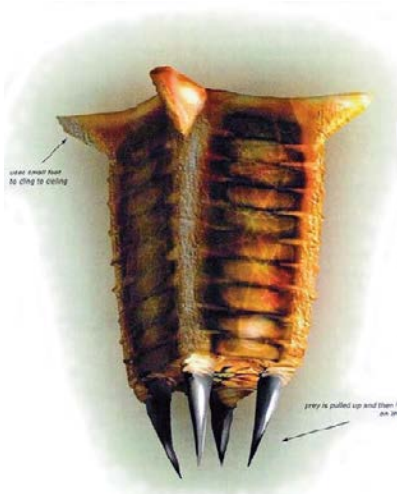
Half-Life is a masterpiece of epic proportions, the *Saving Private Ryan* of first-person shooters. You know you're in for something special right when the opening tram immerses you in a convincing world.

GamePro, 1998

■ Exploring *Half-Life*'s alien worlds divided the game's audience. No wonder Gordon didn't return there in the 2004 sequel.


■ Of course, there were some issues. The fact that the engine was changed so many times from the original meant that the designers were constantly catching up. They'd be stuck in this situation where they were waiting for new features to come down the line rather than just building prototypes straight away. And it wasn't really until the engine was finished that they were able to get productive with it."

Famously, Valve had planned on integrating real-time physics into *Half-Life*'s many puzzles – themselves an innovation within the then fairly limited shooter genre – but were deterred both by the size of the task so late in development and the car crash that was DreamWorks Interactive's *Trespasser*. Still, what remained was above and beyond any other FPS available on shelves. In hindsight, yes, it probably wasn't as beautiful as *Unreal*, but what *Half-Life* lacked in graphical chops, it made up for in its (still) astonishing AI. The military enemies in the game were Valve's primary AI showcase – and at the right difficulty, they're still some of the cleverest grunts both in videogames and the world of flesh

A LOT OF OUR LEVEL DESIGNERS WERE EXPERIENCED QUAKE MODDERS

and capillaries. A lone commando was bad enough, but in groups they demonstrated an alarming amount of co-operative intelligence, seemingly changing their strategy on-the-fly as they attempted to outmanoeuvre the player. Valve has never revealed the secrets behind *Half-Life*'s AI, and, curiously enough, the Combine soldiers of *Half-Life 2* seemed more behaviourally staid in comparison. Demonic possession, perhaps?

At any rate, while *Half-Life*'s extraterrestrial enemies were notably less intelligent they were deeply, sometimes disturbingly, original. Squirming Freudian allusions abounded, from the headcrab's vaginal underbelly to the more overt excesses of the Gonarch – in Gabe Newell's words, "a giant testicle on a 20-foot-tall armoured spider." According to the sumptuous Valve bio *Raising The Bar*, most of these designs came out of the rather twisted brain of Ted Backman, whose plan was to elicit psychosexual reactions in his (presumed) young male audience.
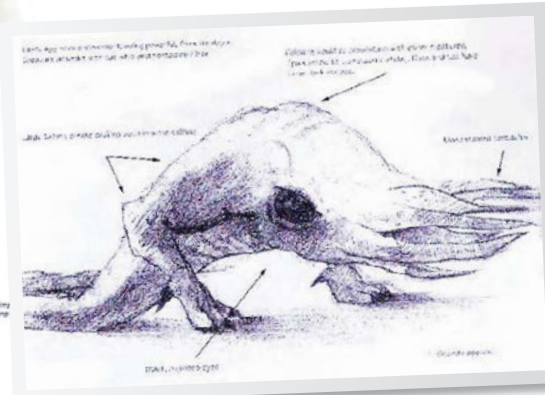
■■■ IT WAS THE juxtaposition of Black Mesa's sterile blues and the pallid flesh-white and claret of *Half-Life*'s monsters that made the game so aesthetically memorable, which may go some length to explain why many players found the penultimate chapter, set on the alien planet Xen, a bit boring in comparison. Still, they liked it enough to create countless mods extending the storyline while Laidlaw went to work on creating an even more oblique and surreal plot

Immersion Tactics

■ *Half-Life* presented a minimalist mode of shooter design, starting an anti-HUD vogue that resulted in ideas such as *Dead Space*'s holographic information display, or the sound-based user interface in Peter Jackson's *King Kong: The Official Game Of The Movie*. (Whoever came up with that title should be put in front of a firing squad, by the way.) "We were inspired by id's efforts with *Doom* and *Quake*," Laidlaw shrugs. "It was about having a completely unobtrusive interface, and that fed into making Gordon Freeman completely transparent as a character. You were meant to feel like you were him. Our ultimate goal, throughout the entire development process, was to make *Half-Life* as immersive as possible."
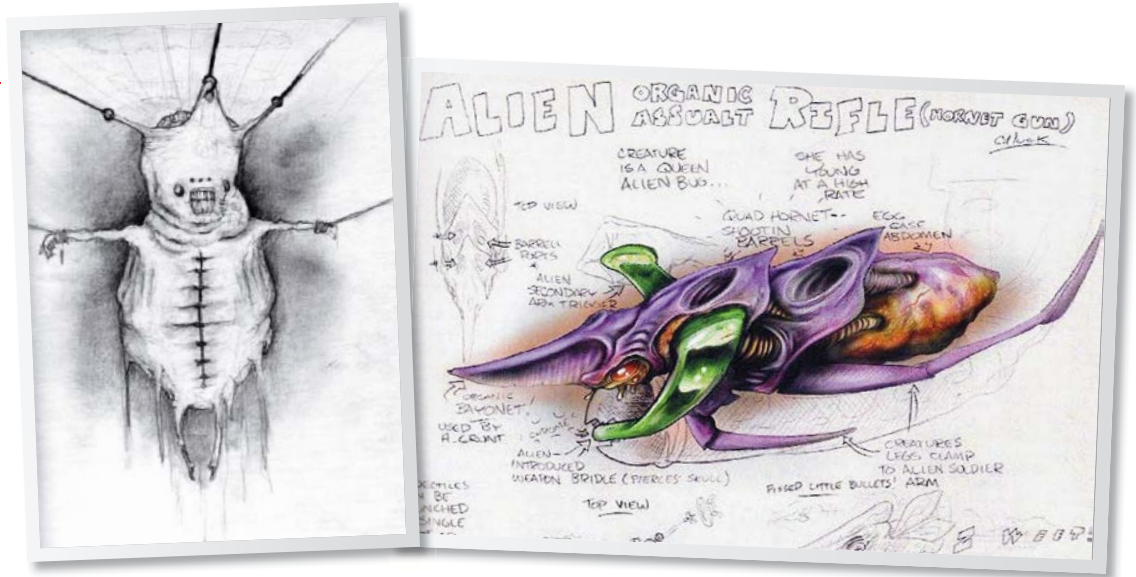
for *Half-Life 2*. And that was only the tip of the iceberg – quite apart from *Half-Life*'s breathtaking single-player component, Valve also managed to foster the most formidable user-content community the games industry has ever known, one which ended up spawning two of the most successful multiplayer games of all time: *Team Fortress Classic* (and *Team Fortress 2*) and *Counter-Strike*.

It isn't too difficult to see why *Half-Life* made such a deep impact on the gaming landscape, which is undoubtedly why Laidlaw remains surprised that so few developers have followed in Valve's footsteps. "I must say," he explains, "it was a lot fewer than I expected. I suppose it's a risky endeavour, and the narrative rules we implemented should only be done so if you know you're going to get something good out of it. That said, I've seen a lot of examples where *Half-Life*'s influence is applied in a piecemeal fashion – *Medal Of Honor*, for instance, and

Call Of Duty both followed those principles, but it was inconsistent. There were moments of non-interactive exposition interspersed with the dynamic parts."

Perhaps, though, it's simply that *Half-Life* is much more pervasive than even Laidlaw realises. The game's core principles of dynamic exposition, first-person puzzle-solving and narrative depth have coloured everything from *Halo* to *Metroid Prime*, and it's now becoming increasingly difficult to remember where it all came from. And on a more wistful note, now that popular game design prefers emergence over scripted sequences, and open-endedness over tight, contained level design, it may well be that *Half-Life* marked the beginning of an era that is soon to close. Will it be consigned to the scrapheap of irrelevance, then? Unlikely: Ivan the Space Biker's just going to have to get used to keggers with Duke Nukem and Crash Bandicoot, because Gordon Freeman was meant for better things. ⓖ

■ It may be the thinking man's shooter, but *Half-Life* is still a fun FPS at its core.

"The gameplay and the world, the way it's rendered, and the story that you go through is completely seamless"
BRIAN HORTON, CRYSTAL DYNAMICS

COUNTER-STRIKE

Released: 1999 **Publisher:** Sierra Entertainment **Developer:** Minh 'Gooseman' Le, Jess Cliffe **System:** PC

Last year Valve released the latest iteration of *Counter-Strike, Global Offensive*. It was the second (and more successful) attempt at bringing the shooter to home consoles.

The Half-Life mod-turned-multiplayer-phenomenon, Counter-Strike wasn't just the go-to PC first-person shooter but defined the genre for a new generation

THE PROLIFERATION OF modding during the late-Nineties demonstrated a hotbed of independent creativity, the spirit of which has since transformed into the prosperous climate of 'indie' development. These inventive user-made endeavours ranged from simple gameplay adjustments to complete overhauls of assets and design, themselves often spawning into properties as big as their source DNA.

Many successful mods have gone on to reach mass recognition, but as the trend continued to grow in stature it was Valve that stormed the vanguard as one of the first developers to actively encourage and cultivate a community to tinker and innovate its original design documents. Minh 'Gooseman' Le and Jess Cliffe were just two students when they began working on *Counter-Strike*, both spending more time devoted to coding the game than on their actual studies. But it was a gamble that paid off, the duo selling the game back to Valve, working with the studio and forging its legacy as one of the most influential and enduring FPS of all time.

Released in 1999 as internet multiplayer was in a nascent state, *Counter-Strike* was the antithesis of the excessive slaughter and unrelenting pace of *Quake* and *Unreal Tournament*. Offering a tactical alternative that placed as much emphasis on careful planning and teamwork as it did having lightning-fast reflexes (although speed was also a technical issue with dial-up pings soaring into the 100s), *Counter-Strike* required a completely different mentality to a genre on the brink of revolution.

It was in part due to the round system that reshaped how respawning worked. Rather than hurtling through maps spraying lead with little concern for your own mortality, being reckless had a penalty; death resulted in waiting several minutes for a new round to start and diminished the chances of your team's ability to fulfil its objective. *Counter-Strike* established stakes previously absent from a genre reliant on speed and did so without compromising what made the act of namelessly killing people online so thrilling in the first place.

This contributed to an unprecedented approach to teamwork. It became immediately clear that communication was key to winning. It became even clearer that you couldn't trust strangers. Clans became an integral component to the dedicated

KILLER MOMENTS
WHILE COUNTER-STRIKE IS PACKED FULL OF MOMENT-TO-MOMENT JOYS, A FEW SIMPLE PLEASURES WILL RESONATE WITH ANY CS VET…

KNIFE KILL
★ The knife kill is one of the trickiest manoeuvres to pull of in the tense 5v5 battleground of *Counter-Strike*. And while there's a mischievous gratification in a sly back stab, challenging an opposing player to a proper knife fight and coming out the victor is a true right of passage for any *CS* player.

GAWP AT AWP
★ The first few seconds of any *CS* match is a mad scramble toward the perfect vantage point. Map de_dust2 offers a perfect exploit in that regard; terrorists can arm themselves with the contentious AWP sniper rifle and study the small slit between the main gangway doors for unsuspecting counter-terrorists.

THE BRIDGE
★ The design layout of de_aztec is one of *Counter-Strike*'s most superb creations. The highlight is undoubtedly the bridge that connects one side of map to the other. A claustrophobic walkway dangling above a vast expanse, it's a testament to the brilliant map design that elevates *Counter-Strike* above its competitors.

Counter-Strike experience; it was a proud badge of honour to brandish a clan tag and the incentive to invest more hours into training was rewarded by triumphing in community tournaments and LAN events. *Counter-Strike* became as much a competition as it did a game and there's a clear pathway to the popularity of esports, dedicated portals and the ubiquitous streaming culture that leads right back to the early days of *Counter-Strike* and the dynamic interactions of its community.

■■■ More than anything, though, *Counter-Strike* wasn't just a fan creation but fostered a community of fans that contributed as much to the game as they took out. It laid the groundwork and dared its fans to do better, the results of which were some of the most popular maps and user-created modes that dwarfed the creative achievements of the original team. It provided an accessible creative platform; somewhere for would-be developers to cut their teeth in what would become a dominant genre in subsequent years.

Counter-Strike arrived at a flashpoint in the industry, at a time when consumers were beginning

KEY FACTS

■ Creators Minh Le and Jess Cliffe were hired by Valve following the release of the mod to helped create a full retail version of *Counter-Strike*, which was released a year later.

■ Because of the prolific cheating on *Counter-Strike* servers, Valve implemented VAC (Valve Anti-Cheat), which detected any player hacks and permanently banned users trying to use them.

■ *Counter-Strike* has since released several sequels to *Counter-Strike*, including the unremarkable *Condition Zero*, the recent console-focused *Global Offensive* and two adaptations aimed at Asian territories.

to look toward online as a competitive arena. With its combination of simplistic and balanced design outlook, matched with a reliance on player skill, it was the ultimate proving ground for gamers.

It's a testament to the strong foundations of the game that its original retail iteration (referred to as 1.6 due to its original and antiquated patch method) is still played so frequently today despite subsequent sequels. It doesn't have the flashy physics engine of its successor *Source*, nor does it boast the crisp visuals that would come with its most recent console counterpart, but what it does have is an accessibility that made it utterly addictive.

It's hard to imagine the first-person shooter genre being what it is today without *Counter-Strike*. It established the fundamentals of the genre and infused it with a delicate balance that has since been adopted by almost every major FPS franchise. Not only that but its community tweaked the formula further, launching alternate game modes, many of which integrated what has become prevalent across the genre in recent years: the addition of experience points in a mode that shifted the focus onto additional perks and abilities.

Whether or not this influenced *Battlefield* or *Call Of Duty* is a moot point: *Counter-Strike* was there first and, not only that, its original vision stands tall today as one of the best shooters you could possibly spend time playing. It helped redefine a genre, it established the ideal of a prosperous user-generating community and it would influence some of the biggest franchises in modern videogame history. Above all else, though, it's still a game that thousands of people play on a daily basis. Not just for nostalgia purposes, but because its principles and mechanics continue to match the contemporary standards of the genre today. There aren't many games celebrating their 15-year anniversary that can lay claim to that.

COUNTER-STRIKE REQUIRED A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT MENTALITY TO A GENRE ON THE BRINK OF REVOLUTION

THE BEST OF
MODNATION

WE TAKE A LOOK AT A SELECTION OF THE MOST CREATIVE AND ENJOYABLE HALF-LIFE MODS THAT HAVE BEEN RELEASED OVER THE YEARS

TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC

■ EQUALLY POPULAR AS *Counter-Strike*, it began life as a popular *Quake* mod before making the jump over to the *Half-Life* engine. *Team Fortress* introduces a class-based system where players must work together to complete objectives. The impact of *Team Fortress* was similar to that of *Counter-Strike*, reaching a level of stratospheric popularity that afforded it a full retail release and would become a continued influence on the genre.

DAY OF DEFEAT

■ ANOTHER MOD THAT was eventually granted a full release, *Day Of Defeat* remains one of the best WWII first-person shooters to ever hit PC. *Day Of Defeat* maps muster scenarios from real WWII battles, with objectives based on historical record. It does an admirable job of evoking the period and presenting a tactical and immersive backdrop. *Day Of Defeat: Source* followed but by then most FPS gamers had moved on to modern warfare.
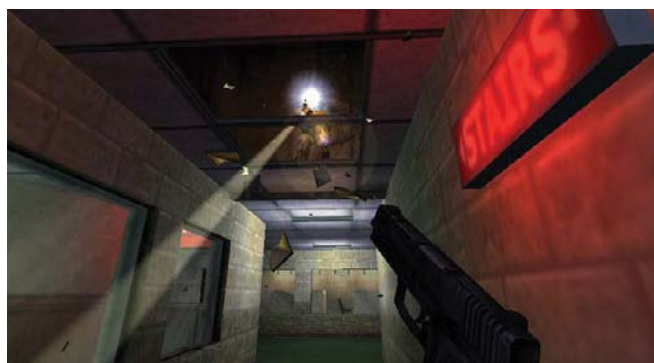
HALF-LIFE INVASION

■ A SINGLE-PLAYER mod developed out of France as a proposed follow-up to the events of *Half-Life*. It picks up the story after Gordon Freeman encounters G-man and throws the crowbar-wielding physicist through a series of clandestine laboratories to once again save the world. It has some interesting twists on the original setup – including space probes and teleportation – and Freeman even gets to batter aliens with another chunky DIY tool.

RICOCHET

■ A TRON-INSPIRED deadly game of Frisbee dressed up in dayglo colours, *Ricochet* is an oddly compelling multiplayer experience and another *Half-Life* mod that gained cult popularity. There's a simple concept at its core: the main objective is to knock your adversary off one of the floating platforms, using your flying disk and the environment to gain the upper hand. It's a fast-paced and gratifying spin on the traditional deathmatch mode.

SVEN-COOP

■ SVEN-COOP CAN almost be considered a precursor for *Left 4 Dead*. Players had to work together to kill a wave of AI enemies and navigate through each stage working together to solve environmental puzzles. It was more than a little rough around the edges but *SVEN-COOP* had a unique charm and its servers were always packed with shooter fans looking for a fresh challenge.


THEY HUNGER

■ A STORY-FOCUSED single-player horror game, *They Hunger* is set in a backwater Fifties town where you assume the role of a writer who has just moved into the area to gain inspiration for his latest novel. So far, so Alan Wake. But when a zombie apocalypse tears apart the area, it's up to you to save the townsfolk, filling any brain-munching undead that get in your way with lead.

THE SPECIALISTS

■ THE NINETIES WERE big for action movies. With *The Matrix*, John Woo and Michael Bay, games sought to replicate the thrills and carnage seen on the big screen. *The Specialists* does a great job of evoking that era, with incredible action, the implementation of bullet time, and bonuses awarded for pulling off combos and stunts. Whereas *Counter-Strike* wrote the book on tactical online FPS, *The Specialists* took it, stuffed it with a bunch of C4 and fired an RPG at it.
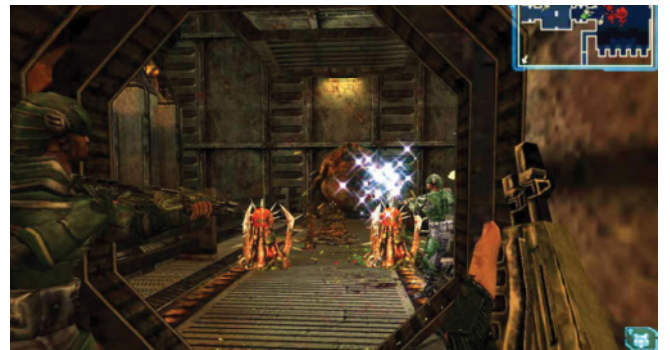
NATURAL SELECTION

■ ANOTHER ONLINE first-person shooter, *Natural Selection* combined the genre with real-time strategy. Pitting marines against aliens on a series of futuristic battlegrounds, most of the action has a first-person perspective with players in various roles on both teams to complete objectives. The most unique is the Marine Commander, with one player on the marine side taking on the role to oversee the battlefield from a top-down perspective and lead the team.

SCIENTIST SLAUGHTERHOUSE

■ IN MANY WAYS, *Scientist Slaughterhouse* has a lot in common with *Garry's Mod*. Both utilise the physics of its native engine to enable players to experiment and dick around in a sandbox. However, *Scientist Slaughterhouse* has a little more structure, where Gordon Freeman has to eradicate scientists who seem to be appearing out of nowhere using increasingly bizarre contraptions and execution techniques to get the job done.


CHEMICAL EXISTENCE

■ ANOTHER TOTAL CONVERSION of *Half-Life*, this atmospheric single-player game features a substantial campaign and a whole new suite of weaponry to explore. Originally developed as *Quake II* mod, the development team worked on *Chemical Existence* for three years before it saw a release. The time paid off, with a slick, satisfying shooter that has players gunning down a series of grunts, gangbangers and mutants that roam the gloomy world.
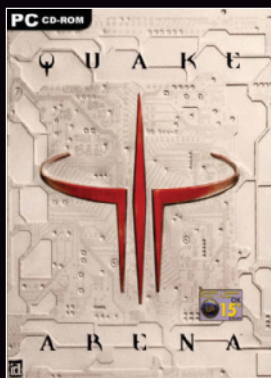
QUAKE III ARENA

Hardcore gaming came of age with an uncompromising approach to single and multiplayer gaming. games™'s heart takes a beating as we look back

IT IS A game that is some 15 years old, but that hasn't prevented it from continuing to be talked about. In 2011, a rather bizarre story began to emerge surrounding *Quake III Arena*, the popular, pure first-person shooter which swept aside any sort of plot and made its debut on the PC in 1999 to immense fanfare.

A player, it was reported, was intrigued by the game's artificial intelligence. He liked the clever way that the bots didn't just walk up and down in a set pattern but instead learned. He was rather taken by how these bots figured out how best to annihilate players and understood how someone played, before it conjured up fresh tactics to outwit people.

In 2007, he set up a *Quake III Arena* server and had 16 bots face each other again and again. In 2011, he returned and noticed that the bots were standing still and facing each other. There had been no attempts for them to go for the kill. They had, he surmised, learned that the best way to survive was to stop killing each other. It was perhaps an indication of how world peace could be achieved.

Except it wasn't. The story was picked up in the middle of 2013 by various media but it was later found to be untrue. Which is a shame, although Graeme Devine, the Glaswegian coder who designed *Quake III Arena*, was unfazed about the whole issue anyway. "Could bots eventually just stand around?" he asks. "Yes, but probably due to a float error. As floating point numbers grow, their accuracy decreases so over time their accuracy becomes meaningless."

And yet the fact that this 'news' was picked up on at all said much for *Quake III Arena*. Its design, its graphics and its concept ensured that it was a game that didn't just fade away as the millennium took hold. It was a game that people played, experimented with, perhaps wanted to spin yarns about because it was good to talk about great games. By honing the deathmatch to its purest sense and marrying it with reaction-dependent, rapid action-based play, id

Software achieved something very special. It is exactly what its co-founder John D Carmack had desired.

"My take is that John wanted to make a pure 'internet' game and move on from the story-driven *Quake II*," says Devine, who was drafted onto the project shortly after it had begun. Carmack and Devine had talked and emailed for years. Both had made their mark on the videogame industry. Carmack had already been named among the most influential people of all time by *Computer Gaming World* magazine and was well known for his work as the lead programmer

> **BY HONING THE DEATHMATCH TO ITS PUREST SENSE, ID SOFTWARE ACHIEVED SOMETHING SPECIAL**

of *Commander Keen*, *Wolfenstein 3D*, *Doom*, *Quake* and *Rage*. Devine, along with Rob Landeros, had founded Trilobyte, which produced *The 7th Guest* and *The 11th Hour*. It closed in 1999 but it had formed a great legacy along the way.

"WHEN TRILOBYTE CLOSED we continued to talk and John asked me to go to Texas to chat with himself, Kevin and Adrian," says Devine, of the meeting that led to his involvement with *Quake III Arena*. "They were looking for someone like me, with a technical and design background, to bridge the technical aspirations of the project, which was to be an internet game with creative aspirations, which was to still be a cool game. I moved out to Texas soon afterwards."
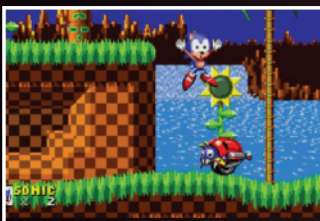
Right from the start it was decided that *Quake III Arena* would change the way games approached single-player. In 1998 id Software had announced that Trinity, a technology project Carmack had been

■ The Plasma Rifle was lethal, but not as much as the mighty Rail Gun.
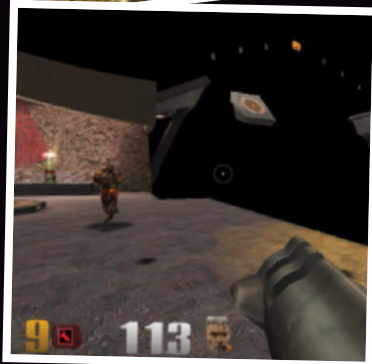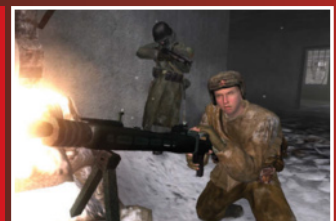
>. A GAMING EVOLUTION
Sonic The Hedgehog > Quake Arena III > Call Of Duty

Well, it influenced *Quake III* to a degree, anyway. The bounce pads could have been inspired by the blue critter.
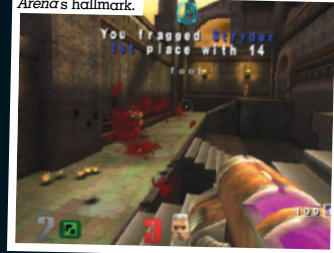
Quake III Arena's engine, id Tech 3, was used by Infinity Ward to produce its incredible military first-person shooter.
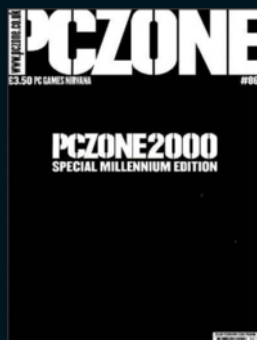
working on, was being scrapped. It was set to maximise 3D graphics accelerators and seamlessly integrate streaming, server-side Java code in gameplay. The developer said Trinity was to be canned because id Software wanted a greater concentration on multiplayer modes. *Quake III Arena* was the game that emphasised this to a great degree.

"There was never a thought to make *Quake III Arena* a single-player game in the classic sense besides what we shipped in the box," says Devine. "In that sense *Quake III Arena* is an arcade game, pure and simple, and I think it works really well as a single-player game."

The decision was criticised – *PC Zone's* review said "it smacks of laziness and penny-pinching", but id countered that it didn't have the resources nor the time to develop a mission-based solo adventure. The single-player mode enabled gamers to battle against 30 AI bots over eight different tiers containing 26 levels of various complexity and size. It took the ethos of multiplayer and kept it pure. Sure, playing against real people was *Quake III Arena's* strength but the bots were damn fine opposition too.

"It was tough to do," concedes Devine. "We eventually hired a programmer from Holland called 'Mr Elusive' [Jan Paul van Waveren] who had written a bot for *Quake II* that was really good."

Van Waveren loved first-person shooters. During his last years at secondary school, he made a lot of levels for *Doom* which he distributed through a BBS. He progressed to *Quake* and loved the way it played through a local network or over the internet. By 1997, he had become very intrigued by bots and had produced one called Omicron that could reliably simulate a human player. Within two weeks, it was close to being the most popular *Quake* bot around.

For van Waveren, *Quake II* altered the landscape further. AI was programmed in C and id Software had released the source code so enthusiasts like van Waveren could adapt parts of it. His bot for *Quake II* was the result: human players could state their opponents' weapon preferences and whether they would be more happy to attack or defend, but it could easily depart from that and be less predictable. The Gladiator bot was released in December 1998 and, in June 1999, Devine wrote to van Waveren and asked him to visit the team in Dallas to swap some ideas. It only took a few days to adapt the *Quake II* bot for *Quake III* and van Waveren subsequently sold them the source code. The developer also employed him to help further integrate the bot into the game and to extend the bot code.

"He wrote the bot code for *Quake III* and I gave them the personalities," says Devine. "I would sit behind two testers from Activision for hours at a time and change the numbers for the characters up and down by single digits and then rewatch the same game with the same testers over and over. We were altering their accuracy, love of a weapon, response time and so on and we didn't use any tricks. The AI doesn't cheat and some of them play in a very human manner while others are just *Terminator* Hunter-Killers. We got the characters we wanted and a fantastic programmer to boot."

The *Quake III* bot worked over four layers. The bottom layer contained the information the bot could acquire and the actions it could take, using this to determine where it should go. The next layer handled short-term objectives that were used to determine what could and should be done; the bots weighed up the pros of cons of a situation. The third layer set out longer-term goals and dealt with strategy; it posed questions essential to survival. It then used this to deduce its moves, working out what was best to do at that

GRAEME DEVINE
Designer

■ Blood-splattered walls and a high-tempo atmosphere with multiple players was *Quake III Arena's* hallmark.

Quake III Arena is truly a beautiful thing. Detailed architecture, fluid character movement, fast relentless action – the purest deathmatch experience you'll ever have.

PC Zone, issue 86, February 2000

■ *Quake III Arena* was ported by Raster Productions and released by Sega for the Dreamcast in 2000. Four players could play online against Dreamcast and PC gamers.

moment and whether it needed to solve a problem or whether it needed to battle with an opponent.

■■■ "A LOT OF the artificial intelligence for the *Quake III Arena* bots is based on common sense solutions," says van Waveren. "But there are also several technically advanced solutions to solve some of the hard problems like route and path finding. I gained a lot of experience creating the Omicron bot for *Quake* and the Gladiator bot for *Quake II*, and a lot of the solutions are as a result of that experience." Getting all of this right pleased the id Software bosses who emphasised technology above all else. Releasing the source code later showed how much of a triumph of programming the game was. "The *Quake III* source code was very clean and nice to read," says Devine, adding, "I think they probably took all the swear words out of the comments too."

Letting programmers take a peek under the hood to see how BSPs and the like really moved was a
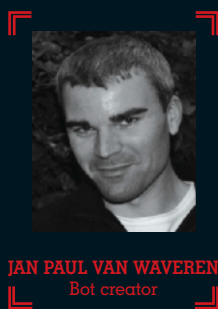
way of seeing what others could do with the game and whether or not some notable talent could emerge. "Id is about tech, tech, tech and then tech," says Devine. "If something changed that meant the artists had to redo everything, then that happened." He said id Software was a melting pot of creativity with some of the best and smartest people on the planet making a game. At the same time, it made life tough. "They are passionate and will argue and demand the same of you in return," he says. "It could chew you up inside if you let it, and the pressure was incredible, but it takes pressure to make diamonds."

The complexity, however, wasn't supposed to be passed on to the gamers. Design was deliberately minimalist. The graphics were superb and the engine proved to be incredibly slick. It had cutting-edge character animation, sparking lighting effects, fast play and noticeable intensity. It would cause palms to sweat. The decision was made to let players plunge in and get on with it.

"Adding any kind of menu system was hard," Devine says. "John didn't want a menu system; he wanted it to be completely internet-based and use a browser to launch the game. In retrospect that was a good plan, but it was ten years too early. We designed and added the menu system as the last component to *Quake III* under the direction of Kevin Cloud, who is absolutely fantastic at layout and design and getting the right look down to the pixel."

The feeling that gamers just wanted to play and not get bogged down with the plot was also stark. "Oh, the immortals taking the heroes of each world and time to pit them against each other wasn't a plot? How could you miss that!?" laughs Devine. "Activision had big worries about the single-player but I don't think we did. When q3test went out on the internet and zillions of people played it, we felt somehow vindicated with

■ Many would argue that *Quake III Arena* has yet to be bettered, certainly as a pure deathmatch experience.

FROM THE FORUM

The ports

■ As well as receiving an official port for the Dreamcast, which allowed gamers of either the PC or Sega's console to play against each other, the game also appeared on the PS2, courtesy of Bullfrog Productions, but its loading times were excruciating.

It's the unofficial ports which are most intriguing, though. There has been a release for iOS via Cydia for those with jailbroken devices and it has also found its way to the PlayStation Portable, but the biggest headturner has been the Raspberry Pi edition that was shown in August 2011 to be running a specially compiled ARM version on Debian.

You can find this by going to www.store. raspberrypi.com/projects/openarena?adult and it actually runs faster than many people would have experienced when the original version of *Quake III Arena* was launched.

■ The Arena Gate map was released as part of the demo.
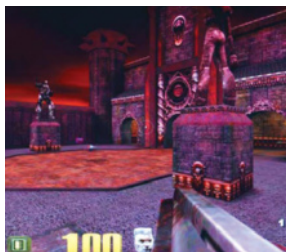
...the internet-only feel of the game. That said, we didn't feel the single-player was a cheat – it was just a straight-up arcade game. Are people disappointed with the plot in *Space Invaders*?"

Devine loved the way the characters shifted around the screen and he still feels it has just the right movement. "I remember when we played the first *Unreal* game at the office and some of their movement on jump pads and accelerator ramps felt a bit less fluid than ours. We felt that was a huge advantage for the overall experience with *Quake III Arena*. Of course, Epic caught up, but I think *Quake III* was one of those 'Mario moments' where the movement was 'just right'."

Some of the movement was indeed inspired and lifted the game in a literal sense. Bounce Pads and Accelerator Pads took over from lifts and ladders and they would throw players into the action in any direction they wanted to go. It sped the game up and cut out any cumbersome waiting times. With the addition of the Flight powerup, which allowed for swift platform-to-platform movement, and teleporters, which would propel a character to a random spot, the action shifted around at a fair old pace.

Being hooked up online brought its own issues, though. Internet lag had caused problems for some games and, as Devine says, *Quake III Arena* was introduced to the world at a time when bandwidth and connection speed was rather low. A 56kbit modem struggled at times but the programmers at id Software tweaked the code no end to ensure that it would be less of a problem with *Quake III Arena* than with other similar games trying the same thing at the same time.

"At the time it was the only thing you could really play on a 56kbit modem that looked awesome," Devine says. "We worked a lot on the network compression and eventually security but the multiplayer over a modem was incredible for the time. Everyone takes the internet for granted now. It's on every machine 24/7 and if it's not you're weird. Back then it was the opposite."

With potential internet problems in mind, they made sure that everything included in the game was there purely on merit so that it wouldn't bloat. It led to rows: "We argued a lot. About everything. Every feature. In a good family-like argument if you were all brothers and didn't mind the odd bit of yelling," says Devine. But it was also creative. "It was one of the best creative processes I've been through where we would spend hours discussing the angle spread the shotgun and how many pellets it would shoot and what damage each pellet would achieve and what the accuracy of each pellet was within the spread. Each and every feature fought to be there and if it didn't win it was gone."

Customisation was also important to the team and id Software wanted players to feel they could control all aspects of the game and feel a sense of ownership. "Everything could be customised," says Devine.
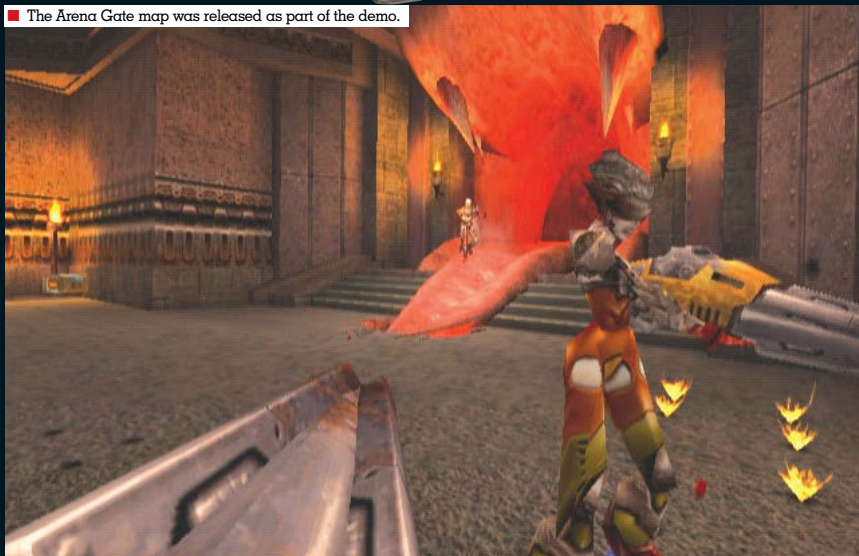
"I remember years later John and I walked around a QuakeCon watching people play in tournaments and people had the field-of-view set to wide, textures switched off, shadows off, everything to a minimum, and John remarked that wasn't what we intended when we made the game. We added the ability for tournaments to set the player variables after that so all players had the same specs."

■■■ FOR DEVINE, A level playing field was vital if the feeling of being on a side in a game was to truly work. He was used to team-based games – "Like playing in teams on *Warcraft II*," he says – and that drove much of the thought behind an expansion pack called *Quake III: Team Arena*, which was released at the tail end of 2000. Fan mods had already covered much of what *Team Arena* went on to implement, but it showed id was aware of the need to focus on new game modes, team play, fresh weapons, player models and items.

Not that the existing weapons weren't much cop. The spraying machine gun, the power of the grenade launcher and the satisfaction of the melting plasma gun sat alongside railguns, rocket launchers and shotguns. Trying to frag with the gauntlet was nigh on impossible but the reward in doing so was richly satisfying.

All of this combined to make *Quake III Arena* a near-perfect offering and one that still proves popular in some professional e-sports tournaments. That it reviewed well for its weapons, special effects and textures – but less well for the narrator's voice and originality – was pleasing for Devine. "I was absolutely blown away," he says.

For a number of years, Devine used to play the game a lot. His config is still on there but he's changed it up a bit since the release. He tends to play more console games now than PC games and migrated to *Halo* when he made *Halo Wars*. But there will always be fondness for *Quake III Arena* in his heart.

"The mod community has sparked game companies,

> **EVERY FEATURE FOUGHT TO BE THERE – IF IT DIDN'T WIN, IT WAS GONE**
> **GRAEME DEVINE, DESIGNER**

careers, and a tremendous outlet of creativity over the years and I think I'm really proud of some of the work I've seen," he says. "People still play q3test1 and q3test2 today. That blows me away. *Quake III* was a combination of the right team of people at the right time with the correct amount of passion. It's rare that that happens and I've been lucky enough to be part of that a few times.

"Occasionally I'll see a 'Special thanks to Graeme Devine' appear in a game's credits and it makes me feel very humble. *Quake III Arena* belongs to id Software, and a tremendous team headed up by John Carmack made it. I think it was John's intuition to make modding easy that really let this thing take off and I'm so glad to have been part of it. To quote Sarge, 'Mmmmm… Smells like fresh meat.'" ⓖ

■ The bots put up quite a fight.

■ id Software found itself going up againt Epic's *Unreal Tournament*, and a bloody battle it was too.
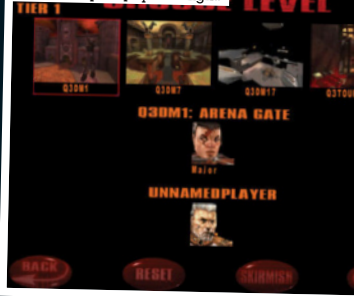
Communication skills

■ During the time *Quake III Arena* was being produced, id Software was still very small and there were just 14 developers. It meant development was incredibly hands-on. "We didn't need a lot of process to manage the team," says van Waveren, who developed his bots in six months. "The communication may not always have been ideal but everyone had a pretty good sense of what everyone else was working on."

Given the budget and the relative lack of people, the developers pitched in to the game-testing process too. "Everyone played the game daily and we regularly had friends over to play the game and provide additional feedback," van Waveren adds, revealing that in the first month of employment he spend three hours straight every morning playing it. "It seemed like a good idea to become as good of a player as possible in order to write challenging AI for the bots."

This approach also helped to keep things simple. "Part of what makes the game stand out is the minimalistic design, van Waveren says. "The game sticks to the very core essence of an arena shooter, and does that really well with ultra-smooth, fast, addictive gameplay."

Not that he was also good at playing it. "We released the q3test so I was playing with other people online," van Waveren recalls. "I always ended up playing 1-1 with this one guy who would simply kick my ass every single time until finally after a month I beat him. After that I never saw him on our servers again…"

TimeSplitters
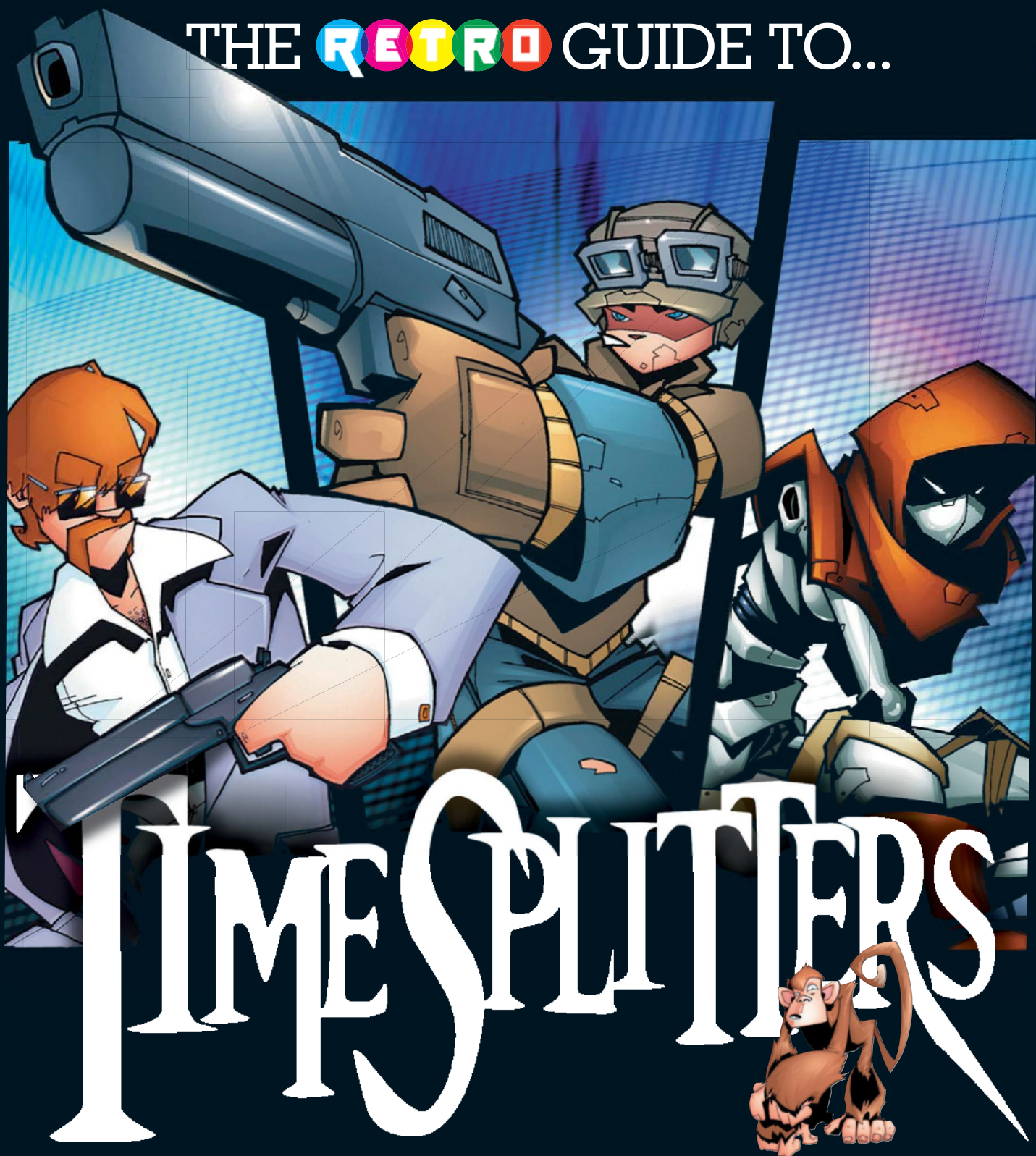
From the creative minds behind Rare's GoldenEye 007 and Perfect Dark, TimeSplitters dispensed with the po-faced pomposity of the genre and enlivened it with quick gunplay and matching wits. games™ sat down with former Free Radical staffers Karl Hilton, Martin Wakeley, Ben Newman and Steve Ellis to talk about the franchise

■ Zombies with guns? *TimeSplitters* prided itself on its outlandish character designs.

■ Multiplayer took precedence during development as Free Radical aimed for a launch-window release.

■ Head onto YouTube and you'll find players speed-running missions in under a couple of minutes.

2000//TIMESPLITTERS

Was *TimeSplitters* an idea that you were developing before the formation of Free Radical Design?

STEVE ELLIS: No. In fact it wasn't even an idea that we had *when* we formed Free Radical. Our planned first game – and the game that Eidos signed us to develop – was an FPS with the working title *Redemption* that would take a couple of years to develop. It was only when the launch window for PlayStation 2 was moved back by six months that we started to think that we could possibly get a game out at launch.

KARL HILTON: Free Radical's original first project was later released as *Second Sight*. But when we realised we might have time to hit the launch of the PlayStation 2, we decided we wanted to make a simple, fast and fun multiplayer game. Having been happy with how much fun the multiplayer element of *GoldenEye* was, it seemed a good opportunity to evolve that type of game a bit further.

SE: This was some time around August 1999. We had been operating for four or five months and the PS2 launch had just moved back to September 2000, so we had one year. *TimeSplitters* was a product of what we believed we could do in the available time, and *Redemption* was put on hold.

What was the original reason behind your departure from Rare?

SE: A combination of various reasons, but mainly personal ambition. We wanted more

control over our destiny and a larger share of the returns. We naively believed that we had been entirely responsible for the success of *GoldenEye* and felt undervalued by the company. It was only when we decided to do it ourselves that we learned about all of the critical things that must have been quietly going on the background to give us the freedom to create the game that we created. It's an environment that we strived – with varying success – to re-create at Free Radical.

KH: Just the usual one that I suspect most start-ups have. A desire for more creative freedom, a realisation we could make games on our own, for ourselves and hopefully collect the rewards if we did a

good job. Rare was a great place to start in the industry, though.

MARTIN WAKELEY: Personally, I was looking for a new challenge. I had been at Rare for nearly a decade and things had changed radically. We no longer were partners with Nintendo and I made my decision to quit when Microsoft took over. That was no reflection on Microsoft; it just seemed a logical time to move on. The Free Radical boys were a real inspiration. They had built a company with a great reputation from scratch after a couple of years. What attracted me to Free Radical

was they had the courage and foresight to start a company and run it with the values they wanted. I rang Graeme and said I wanted in, and after a few contractual issues with Microsoft I began on *Second Sight* as a project manager.

Was the game borne out of a desire to create an alternative first-person shooter experience off the back of *GoldenEye* and *Perfect Dark*?

SE: The multiplayer mode in *GoldenEye* was added at the last minute, so there were numerous features and ideas that we never got to try out. Also, the abilities of the Nintendo 64 were quite limiting. We had plenty of ideas for a multiplayer game

that just couldn't be done on the N64. In the early PR for PS2 there was a lot of hype about its immense power – it would be able to render 75 million polygons per second, which would enable things like crowd scenes, so it seemed like an ideal platform for multiplayer gaming. We only learned later that it would have two controller ports instead of four.

KH: *TimeSplitters* was definitely inspired by and evolved from the experience and lessons of making those two previous games. As a new company, we felt it was important to get a game out in a

> ## "WE WERE CONSCIOUS THAT WE WERE A NEW COMPANY AND THAT MOST NEW COMPANIES FAIL" STEVE ELLIS

reasonable time and not get stuck in trying to do something too complex for our first project. The time constraint provided by the PS2 launch window was a perfect driver for this discipline.

Did you think it would be compared to *GoldenEye* and *Perfect Dark*?

SE: I don't think we thought about that much at the time. I suppose it was inevitable that it would be compared, but our focus was on the future rather than the past. We had seen a lot of failed startups, with the failure often seeming to be caused by being too ambitious. We wanted to release our first game as soon as we could in order to prove that we could do it and that we had the discipline to know when to stop and ship.
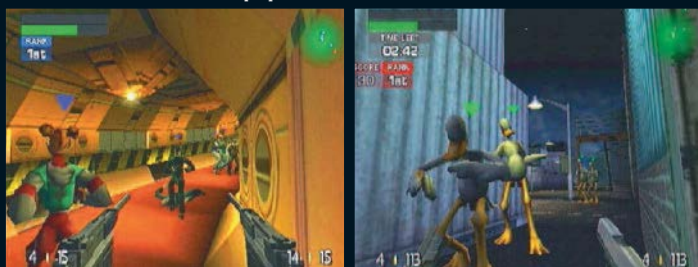
KH: We hoped that gamers would understand the values we placed in our games based on our commitment to high-quality design and art delivered at the cutting edge of software development, which we had demonstrated with *GoldenEye* and *Perfect Dark*, but understand that *TimeSplitters* was an FPS focused on multiplayer fun rather than single-player story.

What was the inspiration for the dynamic cast of characters?

SE: From the start, one of the pillars of *TimeSplitters* was the diversity of its characters and environments. We wanted to make a sandbox that people could play in however they liked, without the constraints of a restrictive movie licence or a typical military FPS, and we happened to hire an incredibly talented and imaginative character artist named Ben Newman, who was working in an ice cream van at the time, having never used a computer. Most of the characters came from [him].

■ *TimeSplitters 2* has become renowned for its frantic multiplayer action.

BEN NEWMAN: Yeah, it was great! Having the opportunity to design characters from so many genres and time periods all in one game was a dream job. Normally in a game I'm restricted to one style of design, like sci-fi or western, but *TimeSplitters* had them all, so it was constantly fun to work on. Also, the team of character artists was really strong; they were all good artists in their own right.

How did you try to distance yourself from PC shooters at the time?

KH: The most obvious method was through the controller. Playing PC FPSs with a mouse and keyboard produces a very different gameplay dynamic. We wanted fast 'twitch' gameplay, but with the added skill level that using an analogue controller required over the easier 'mouse aiming'. *TimeSplitters* was always meant to be about quick, gratifying gameplay with a group of friends around a console and TV rather than desk-based PC gaming.

***TimeSplitters* was made within 18 months of Free Radical opening and in time for**

the PS2 launch. Did it feel like you were rushing production?

SE: We were conscious that we were a new company and that most new companies fail, so we wanted to prove ourselves as soon as possible. Yes, it was a tight deadline and there was a crunch period but it was an incredibly exciting time too. It was a small team and we were all pulling in the same direction, so it was far from the long, drawn-out death march that you often see these days.

One thing that we did was to only write code for exactly what we needed to do. We made a decision to not get distracted by what it might need to do in the future. So, for example, the code was geared towards the PS2 rather than having any kind of layer that might later be extended to other platforms. We knew we'd have to do those things later, but we took the shortest path to having a game on the shelves.

KH: We knew we had a short time frame in order to hit the PS2 launch, but we had a plan and most of us always felt we could deliver on time if we were sufficiently focused, so we got on with it. As our first product, we were very highly motivated to deliver something high quality, on time. It was hard work, but most of the time great fun, as the team was small and very creative. The team spirit was excellent.

THE MANY WEAPONS OF TIMESPLITTERS
GAMES™ TURNS ALL Q BRANCH AND ASSESSES THE BEST OF TIMESPLITTERS' ARSENAL
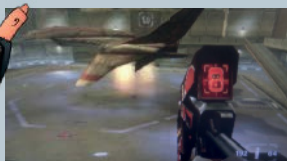
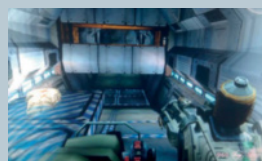### Monkey Gun
PRIMARY FIRE: Bananas
■ The most powerful automatic weapon in *Future Perfect*, firing 64 bananas in a second, it's also the fastest firing weapon in the game.

Brick
PRIMARY FIRE: Brick
■ An extremely effective close-quarter weapon, the brick's ability to bounce off enemies means it'll carve a path through any messy situation. Just don't hit yourself.

Ghost Gun
PRIMARY FIRE: Beam
■ One of the series' more obscure offerings, this ghostbusting piece of kit is used to clear the Mansion of Madness of its spectral nuisances.

Crossbow
PRIMARY FIRE: Arrows
■ A relatively low-tech entry in the *TimeSplitters* arsenal, it's no less one of the most enticing. Set one of the bolts alight and watch the enemies burn.

■ *TimeSplitters 2* significantly expanded the single-player experience, but the multiplayer was still the main draw.

How was the PS2 as a console to develop on compared to the Nintendo 64?

MW: From a design or project management perspective, consoles are consoles. So long as they have similar power, it makes no difference to me personally. I'm sure the tech guys would have a different opinion.

SE: I know that many developers didn't like it, but personally I have to say that it's the console platform that I've enjoyed most. As a developer, you had full, direct access to the hardware. There weren't any hoops to jump through, no layers of code to 'help' you, and the documentation was complete and accurate. These things are rare – too often you have to work with incomplete documentation and unreliable 'black box' APIs, and when something goes wrong, you don't have any way of finding out why, which is incredibly frustrating and unproductive. PS2 was also a Linux-based development environment, which fit in nicely with our Unix backgrounds.

Why did you concentrate on multiplayer?

KH: As a team, we really enjoyed multiplayer, from *GoldenEye* to other team favourites such as *Doom* and *Bomberman*, so there was a lot of enthusiasm to do multiplayer with real depth, quality and variety. It also required less time and resources than the complex storytelling of a single-player game, and we didn't feel we had time to do both in-depth and hit the launch date.

SE: In fact, we almost chose to make the game multiplayer-only, but it seemed too risky a move. However, few people questioned the fact that *Unreal Tournament* had no real single-player mode, so maybe we should have.
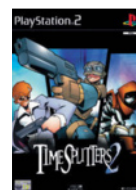
2002//TIMESPLITTERS 2

Did you want to silence the naysayers with the sequel and really address criticisms to do with the single-player?

KH: We didn't care too much about 'naysayers'. We delivered the best game we could in the time available and we were well aware of its limitations, so we were very keen to improve on the single-player element of the game. We were certain gamers didn't think we'd 'forgotten' how to make an immersive, story-driven single-player game. I think we proved that with both *TimeSplitters 2* and *Second Sight*.

SE: A decent single-player game was never really an option in the first game because of time and resource constraints – to make a really good single-player game you need plenty of time iterating on the gameplay. I'd say you need more than a year from the point when most of the necessary features are implemented. With the first game we had a minimal single-player feature set and only about three weeks to set up 18 or so levels. With the second game we had most of the features in place by mid-2001, so we had more than a year left to set up and polish the single-player.

What questions were asked when going into the sequel? What needed to stay, what needed to improve and why?

KH: Our main idea was to improve all the features we had developed for the first one such as the map maker and the challenge modes, but also to deliver a more thorough and well-rounded single-player story mode. We also wanted to develop some of the more popular characters a bit and flesh them out as personalities within the game world.

BN: Generally I was just told what each of the time periods were going to be for each level, and then I went away and came up with a load of characters that I thought would be cool for that setting. The two main

Temporal Uplink
PRIMARY FIRE: N/A
■ A small handheld computer in *TimeSplitters 2* became a wrist-mounted weapon in *Future Perfect*, with the ability to hurl objects at enemies.
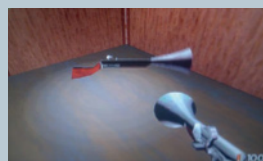
Blunderbuss
PRIMARY FIRE: Shells
■ Even as one of the worst firearms in the game, there's still a certain charm to the blunderbuss. Useless at anything except breathing distance.

Lasergun
PRIMARY FIRE: Laser
■ One of the many sci-fi weapons found in the game. Hold the fire button and unleash a powerful shot that instantly hits the target at medium range.

Raygun
PRIMARY FIRE: Plasma
■ Boasting a Fifties B-movie vibe, the Raygun might as well be a movie prop for all the good it does. Still, great at clearing crowded corridors.
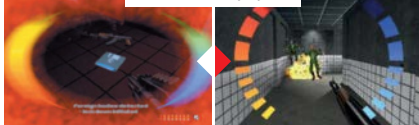
THE PERFECT BOND
THE MANY REFERENCES TO GOLDENEYE AND PERFECT DARK THAT APPEAR THROUGHOUT TIMESPLITTERS

THE HEALTH SYSTEM

■ IT COULD be argued that this is more of a Free Radical trademark than an overt reference to the studio's previous shooters, but as the FPS genre was gradually transitioning to the regenerative health system, the sidebar health meters felt more like a deliberate throwback.


SIBERIA
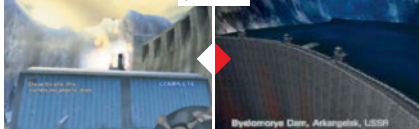
■ SIBERIA HAS a few nods to James Bond's N64 outing. The most obvious is the fact that the whole level is a clear homage to *GoldenEye*'s starting mission. There are also smaller references throughout the stage, including sound effects and items that give the whole shebang a 007 vibe.

BREAKING AND ENTERING

■ THOUGH PERHAPS not as overt as Siberia in its reference, there's nevertheless a palpable similarity between *Future Perfect*'s 2052 stage and the opening of Joanna Dark's debut. Nothing says shady future organisation like metallic walls and big plate-glass windows.

KHALLOS EXPRESS
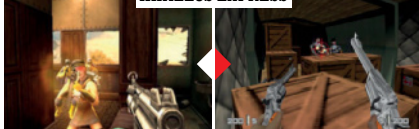
■ WE MAINTAIN that there's no such thing as a bad train level, and Free Radical has yet to prove us wrong. *GoldenEye*'s is perhaps the game's finest, and *Future Perfect* emulates it with another intense entanglement. Keep an eye out for a picture of Joanna Dark in one of the bathroom stalls.

male and female characters came first, then the standard enemy characters, and then for each level there were normally a few silly characters as well. I was left pretty free to just come up with whatever I wanted in terms of the character design.

The sequel was a more impressive technical feat. Was it a case of being more familiar with the hardware?

SE: Yes. As we finished work on the first game, I had a number of ideas for technical improvements that I wanted to try out, but they required more work than we had remaining time, so they had to wait. When we started the sequel, the first thing I did was to overhaul the engine and double the polygon throughput – the last major piece of programming that I was able to do at Free Radical. After that, the growing size of the company meant that my focus had to switch to management.

It was rumoured that the PS2's CPU imposed limitations on development. Did you struggle with getting the most out of Sony's hardware?

SE: Not really. Every platform has its challenges, but our ethos was always to establish the limits early on in a project and work within them, rather than making the game first and then trying to get it to fit into the limits.

How about the importance of Sony's iLink? Was the pre-release promotion of that pressed upon you at the time?

SE: [Laughs] Yes, iLink. I'd forgotten about that. Probably nobody ever used it and it was removed from later PS2 models to cut costs. It was never going to be a huge selling point, but we wanted to make a real networked game and iLink is as close as we could get. We actually had iLink working at the end of *TimeSplitters 1*, but for one reason or another – probably QA, but I can't really remember – we weren't able to launch with it. A similar thing happened with *TimeSplitters 2* – we had online multiplayer 99 per cent implemented, but we were a little too early with that too – nobody was ready on the publishing/platform side – so that had to wait until *TimeSplitters: Future Perfect*.

What were the fundamental design principles when it came to the multiplayer in *TimeSplitters 2*?

■ One of the most distinctive aspects of the franchise is the diverse character designs.
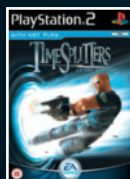

■ Where else would you find a hand as a playable character in a first-person shooter?
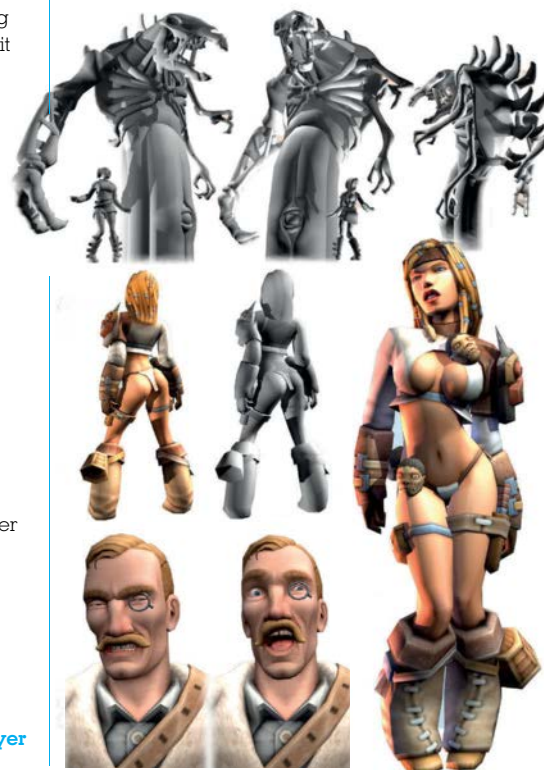
"HOPEFULLY MOST GAMERS APPRECIATED THAT IT WAS JUST UNPRETENTIOUS GOOD FUN" KARL HILTON

2005//TIMESPLITTERS: FUTURE PERFECT

■ The idea of a map builder in a console FPS was unheard of at the time.

Why do you think the third *TimeSplitters* wasn't as well received as its predecessors?

KH: That's a difficult one. It was a more 'complete' game, both in terms of content and technically, especially with the online functionality, which was particularly good for the map maker. Some fans seemed to think that Free Radical Design hadn't made it and that EA had developed it, which was not true. Ultimately, the slightly disappointing sales figures for *TimeSplitters: Future Perfect* damaged the prospects for a fourth game, as potential publishers could see the franchise not moving in the right direction. Personally, I think it was the best one we did.

SE: Its focus was quite different. More time was spent developing the single-player game and less time on multiplayer, which is probably not what people expected of *TimeSplitters*. The move to working with EA was the main reason for this. My take on it is that EA wanted to work with us not because they had played and liked *TimeSplitters 2*, but because they had seen the review scores for *TimeSplitters 2* and believed that they could sell more units than Eidos of any game with those scores. I doubt that they looked at the game at all. Soon after we started working with them, it became apparent that they had a very different way of working

to us. Their method was to identify what they called 'the X' – the defining feature of the game that could be summarised in a few words on the back of the box – and then focus as much effort as possible on reinforcing that 'X'.

This didn't sit well with *TimeSplitters* because it was all about choice, diversity, freedom – there was no one thing that they thought they could hang a marketing campaign off. Eventually they came up with 'blast your way through time', and we were instructed that we needed to focus our efforts on the time-travelling single-player. The multiplayer was considered unimportant, almost an inconvenience due to the amount of QA that it required – you can't test a multiplayer game without multiple players – so it didn't have as much attention as it deserved. I wonder if that was the right decision.

Did the publisher switch from Eidos to EA affect development?

BN: Not for the character team. The only thing I remember EA being adamant about was that Cortez had to be wearing black. Other than that, it was business as usual. People seem to consider *Future Perfect* to be the weakest, but in terms of character design I think it's the strongest.

The single-player differed from the previous games, as it focused on Cortez as the lead playable character. What was the decision behind this?

SE: As we moved from *TimeSplitters* to *TimeSplitters 2*, we added the story

KH: Flexibility was a core idea. We wanted to enable players to create as many interesting and different scenarios as possible and not restrict with worries about balancing or consistency. The huge number of characters, time periods, weapons and the map maker offered a huge potential for variety

SE: I don't remember having any specific principles – or any formal 'design', for that matter. It was fairly organic. People would come up with ideas and we would try them out. If they worked, we used them.

Why do you think the multiplayer in the *TimeSplitters* series has such an enduring legacy?

SE: I think it offers something that most other games don't. It doesn't try to conform to the norms of the genre.

KH: For all the reasons I mentioned in the previous answer. *TimeSplitters* allowed people to be creative with the map maker and silly with the characters, weapons and game modes. Hopefully most gamers appreciated that it was just unpretentious good fun. It was cutting edge in some ways, and 'old school' in others.
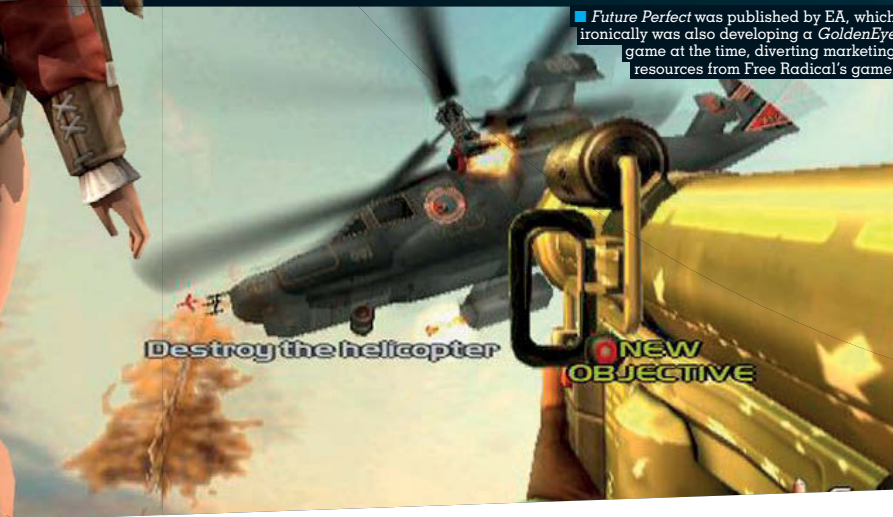
■ *Future Perfect* was published by EA, which ironically was also developing a *GoldenEye* game at the time, diverting marketing resources from Free Radical's game.

mode. Going forward to *Future Perfect*, we definitely wanted to take this further but I don't think it was our intention at the start to have the kind of story that we ended up with. We probably would have had a story more like the one in *TimeSplitters 2* if it was left to us. The move to EA was the main reason we went down the path that we did. My feeling is that EA wanted to work with us not because they had seen *TimeSplitters 2* and liked it, but because they had seen the review scores and liked them. I don't think they knew anything about the game, but [they] were very persuasive.

However, they also believed that in order to do their magic, the game needed to conform to the way that they make and market games. It needed to have a lead character that they could put on the front of the box. It needed to have a single core 'thing' that they could write in a few words on the back of the box, and all of our effort needed to go into supporting that 'X' rather than other things like the map maker and multiplayer.

We weren't allowed to have 'choice, freedom, variety, diversity, fun, sandbox' as our 'X', which are what *TimeSplitters* was about. Apparently you can't market those things, so in the end the 'X' that they arrived at was 'blast your way through time', and we had to add the time-travelling narrative and spend most of our time working on that, to the detriment of everything else.

In *TimeSplitters 2* and *Future Perfect*, the map maker evolved into one of the franchise's most interesting features. How did the idea develop?
**SE:** It was a fun idea that we had while we were making the first game. We wanted to give the players a sandbox in which they could do whatever they wanted, but we also wanted to make it simple enough that almost anyone could achieve something with it reasonably easily. In retrospect, given the limited time and resources that we had, I can't believe that we actually did it. Once it was in, it was only natural to develop it further in the subsequent games. It was never popular with the publishers, though. They saw it – possibly correctly – as a niche feature that required a disproportionate amount of testing. However, we were reluctant to let it go and they did allow us to keep it. I think it was a little ahead of its time in that it wasn't

even online until *Future Perfect* and people weren't really accustomed to the idea of user-created content. However, it was nice to see a core group of people who found ways to share *TimeSplitters 2* maps online through websites, and it was always interesting to see the kind of things that people managed to do with it.

Do you feel enough was done in the marketing on EA's side?
SE: They could have done more, but in the run-up to the launch they told us that they had decided to spend less than they had previously intended. They had [*GoldenEye: Rogue Agent*] releasing and their logic was that for every dollar of marketing they would get a better return from *GoldenEye* than from *TimeSplitters*, so they spent their money on that instead. I like to think that they were wrong, but who knows?

■ By the time *TimeSplitters* reached its third entry, it had featured 274 different characters.
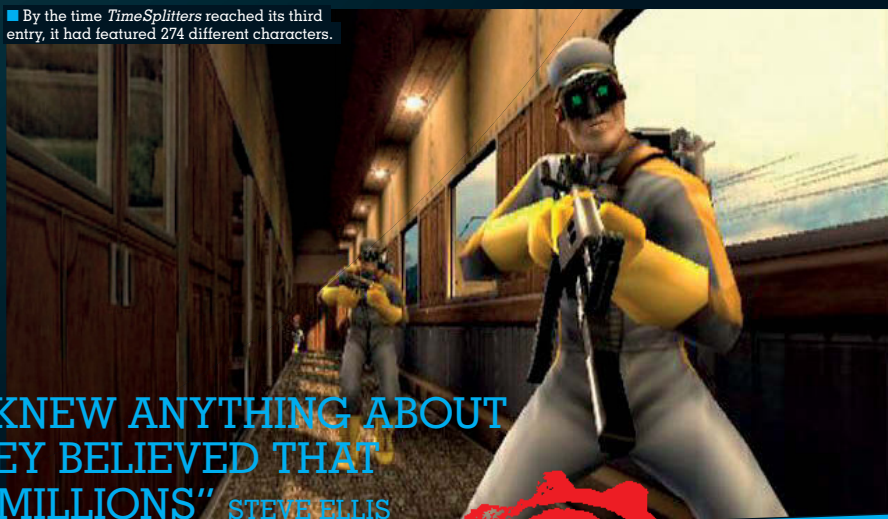
> **"I DON'T THINK EA KNEW ANYTHING ABOUT THE GAME, BUT THEY BELIEVED THAT THEY COULD SELL MILLIONS"** STEVE ELLIS

201X//TIMESPLITTERS 4?

Whatever happened to *TimeSplitters 4*?
MW: I think it's been covered at length elsewhere, but in simple terms we couldn't find anyone who was willing to fund the continuation of the project.

Was that during the last days of Free Radical Design?
SE: That's a very long story. Many factors came together to contribute to the situation – we'd had difficulties with *Haze*, we hadn't managed to find backing for *TimeSplitters 4*, LucasArts had a sudden change of management and then cancelled two projects that we were developing for them and a couple of other interesting

opportunities – a *James Bond* project and an acquisition – didn't work out. It was the run-up to Christmas, so publishers were focused on their holiday releases rather than signing new projects, and also most of the world was in recession. If any of these things had not happened, we may have survived, but all coming together it just wasn't possible to continue.

And then Crytek came along and acquired the company…
MW: Once the company was up for sale we saw a few potential buyers come and view the studio. Rebellion were first up and they showed us some pictures of them jousting. Crytek came next and they were great. I

have a lot of time for the Yerlis. Avni is a great guy and they immediately put us at ease. We knew about their great tech and they were happy for us to stay as an autonomous unit. They were the unanimous preferred option.

So, do you think that *TimeSplitters 4* could still happen in the future? That would be pretty cool, right?
KH: *TimeSplitters* is now part of Crytek. Cevat Yerli has gone on record as saying he'd like to do something with it in the future, but it has to be the right new approach to make it relevant to gamers today. It's been a long time since *Future Perfect* came out.

THE TIMESPLITTERS TIMEMAP
UNTANGLING THE KNOTTED TIME-JUMPING OF THE FRANCHISE

🟡 TIMESPLITTERS
🔵 TIMESPLITTERS 2
🔴 TIMESPLITTERS: FUTURE PERFECT

1920 AZTEC RUINS
1924 KRONIAM
1924 SCOTLAND
1932 CHICAGO
1935 EGYPT
1950 UK
1966 MANSION
1969 RUSSIA
1972 KHALLOS ISLAND
1985 USA

1853 | 1895 | 1920 | 1924 | 1932 | 1935 | 1950 | 1966 | 1969 | 1970 | 1972 | 1985 | 1990 | 1994 | 2000 | 2005 | 2019 | 2020 | 2035 | 2052 | 2243 | 2280 | 2315 | 2401

1990 SIBERIA
1994 USA
2000 FRANCE
2005 CYBERDEN
2020 PLANET X
2035 SPACEWAYS
2052 U-GENIX , USA
2243 ULTRANET COMPLEX, USA
2280 PLANET X
2315 ROBOT FACTORY, USA
2401 SPACE STATION

Trigger Happy 57

"THE MOST DYSFUNCTIONAL TEAM EVER"
THE MAKING OF DEUS EX

Warren Spector and John Romero talk to games™ about the tumultuous development environment that spawned one of the most influential RPGs ever made

IT IS SAID in life that the choices we make define us as individuals. Each minute decision contributes to our character; from the clothes we put on in the morning, to the route we take to work on a daily basis. Most choices merely transpire with little cause, but for Warren Spector a particular day in 1996 would go on to define his whole career.

"In late '96 I left Looking Glass and was independent and I had a proposal for what I thought was going to be the *Command & Conquer* role-playing game," remembers Spector. "I had my pen poised over a contract with Westwood – which was part of EA – and I was about to sign the contract to make the game when John Romero called me up and said 'make the game of your dreams.' He said 'no one will ever tell you what to do. No creative interference at all and a marketing budget three times bigger than you've ever had. Make your game.'

For Spector, the choice was simple. He took a proposal rejected by EA for a real-world role-playing game titled *Troubleshooter* centred around, as Spector describes, "a CIA guy who discovers that he's working for the bad guys" and migrated to Ion Storm in

Dallas, Texas. Bringing with him several key members of Looking Glass Technologies – the pioneering development house behind *Thief* and *System Shock*, which was on the cusp of closure due to financial crisis – the team soon set to work on sculpting a sprawling open-ended cyberpunk noir inspired by Spector's love of his favourite game: *Dungeons & Dragons*.

"I've spent my whole life trying to recreate the experience of playing *Dungeons & Dragons*, where either things never end or the ending is driven by the players," he enthuses. But the original design document that Spector concocted would undergo

Paul Denton   Good thinking. With these tranquilizer darts, you'll have another nonlethal way to take down an enemy in addition to the prod.

multiple transformations during development before eventually spawning the final product that players recognise today. "We certainly documented the hell out of that game," he recalls. "It was a very iterative process. We realised stuff didn't work and we changed it, we rebuilt maps over and over again." A particular and fundamental aspect of the game that Spector designed himself would be one such area that would undergo a substantial renovation during production. "I designed a skills system for *Deus Ex* that we actually implemented and tested. And all the testers told me it sucked and I looked at it and said 'wow, that did not work the way I expected it to at all.' Three days later Harvey Smith comes in with a document outlining a different skill system and I just looked at it and went 'oh yeah. That is way better than the one I came up with.' "

Spector and Harvey Smith's relationship would define the tumultuous production of *Deus Ex*. Spector mentored Smith as a tester on *System Shock* and they spent their evenings discussing scripting and simulation until the early hours of the morning. "He just got it," says Spector of his former colleague. "It wasn't like he was an continued>

CONSPIRACY THEORY

THE MANY CONSPIRACIES THAT INFLUENCED DEUS EX

THE WHITE HOUSE'S SECRET ROOM

Spector's team compiled various blueprints and public images of the White House and discovered a secret hole. This was originally to feature in the game.

AREA 51

The clandestine military bunker that houses extraterrestrial life is always popular with conspiracy theorists. It features heavily in *Deus Ex*'s narrative.

ILLUMINATI/KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

The 'man behind the curtain', it's believed that the Illuminati and Knights Templar between them pull the strings behind the world's governments.

ECHELON

Theories on the signals intelligence collection and analysis network claim it invades public privacy, or is used by the US government for industrial espionage.

BLACK HELICOPTERS

It's believed that these military choppers act as a warning sign of an alleged military takeover of the United States.

opinionated guy who was right a lot, he was just a sponge and open to learning. I love that guy as if he was my son." On *Deus Ex*, however, the two designers would clash over various elements. "We certainly had our share of conflict over the years, which I think derives from a whole Oedipal thing I choose not to think about. But I love that guy. He makes me so much better when we work together.

"I had a story that I wanted to tell that was enormous and sprawling, and we worked on it and worked on it, and much of it survived,"

"We were in a world that was all screwy," Spector remembers. "Everywhere you turned on the internet there was another conspiracy theory and there were books coming out that were about conspiracy things, FEMA, evil and the world ending when Y2K hits. It was in the air. It was impossible to avoid."

DEUS EX MAINTAINED the themes that inspired Spector in the Nineties, a congruent amalgamation of fact, fear and high-fantasy that punctured the budding pessimism and technological fascination of the time. The Ion

"THE EARLY TENSION FORCED US TO DEFINE [THE GAME] IN A WAY A MORE UNIFIED TEAM WOULDN'T"

he continues. "But one day Harvey and Steve Powers – who is magical by the way – came to me and said 'can we go out to lunch? We need to talk about the story.' I remember the restaurant and I remember where we sat; it was an amazing moment. They said 'this story is too big and we don't have the tools to express this story in our game. How about we do this?' And they presented this streamlined version of the story that was in every way better than what I came up with. In those tangible ways he makes me better. Harvey is a really smart, really analytical guy who totally bought into the Looking Glass approach to game development and design. I knew that the minute I met Harvey. It was instant."

Storm team would strip back aspects of the story – the White House was originally a fully explorable environment – but the ambition remained. "We didn't want to make stuff up, we wanted to assume that it was stuff people already believed or was really happening – we were just going to extrapolate a little bit. All that augmented soldier stuff is all real – if you came over to Junction Point now, I still have all our *Deus Ex* research stuff here. I have six three-inch-wide loose-leaf notebooks of articles that I clipped. Executive orders going back to Eisenhower and all the way up to Ronald Reagan on how FEMA can take over the United States tomorrow if they want. We were just building on what people believed to be true."

■ The use of augmentations and skill points was something of a minor revolution back in the late Nineties. From the get-go players could customise their character depending on the type of gameplay they preferred.

Efforts to streamline the story didn't diminish the complexities of crafting a game with multiple gameplay avenues that players could explore to fulfil objectives. It's easy to forget that such a garden-variety structure was innovative to PC gamers of the late-Nineties, but creating a system that seamlessly mixed stealth and combat components took its toll on the development team. To achieve this Spector put together some of the industry's most talented individuals, skilled in either discipline. But these two design sensibilities inevitably clashed. As **games**™ delicately asks whether development was tense, Spector bursts into a fit of giggles. "Oh God yeah," he laughs. "I'm trying to think if I've ever worked on a functional team. *Deus Ex* might have been the most dysfunctional team ever. That was partly by design, foolishly, and partly just because it happened."

Once the laughter subsides, Spector sighs, casting his mind back to the daily stresses of the project. "The reality is that a lot of the leads on that team just really hated each other," he admits. "They hated working with each other. I felt a lot of the time that I was the only one who saw how brilliant each individual component was and if I did nothing else on that project, preventing everybody from killing each other and preventing that team from fracturing – which it could've done – was probably the most important thing I did."

It was a pragmatic choice that threatened to derail the development of *Deus Ex*. Hiring a combination of Looking Glass alumni well-versed in immersive simulation and designers straight off the back of *Ultima* games, Spector had to arbitrate two factional teams. "I knew I was in trouble when I had to call one of the two groups Design Team One and the other one I had to call Design Team A," he chuckles. "It sounds hypocritical but it's all true. Ultimately, that tension got so bad, and I bet a lot of people will disagree with this, but I will go to my grave believing that the early tension forced us to define what the game was in a way that a more unified team wouldn't."

The news of unrest in the Austin offices eventually reached John Romero

THE UNMAKING OF: DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR
THREE THINGS WARREN SPECTOR WOULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY ON THE DEUS EX SEQUEL

When it came to making a sequel to *Deus Ex*, Spector took a step back creatively to allow Harvey Smith to direct the project. Asked whether he regrets withdrawing control, Spector hesitantly says "yes and no. It got to a point at the end of *Deus Ex* that if I said that I was going to be the director of *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, Harvey would've left. Appropriately. I would've been the glass ceiling he couldn't break through in his career." While Spector still had a creative input, he has some lingering regrets about the sequel. "I had to get out of Harvey's way and let him do his own thing. What I regret is there were two or three decisions that he made that I said 'don't do this!' And he said 'no I really want to do this.' and I should have said 'Harvey don't do this – I have one more vote than you.' "

1

JUMPING AHEAD TWENTY YEARS
"I told him don't move it farther in the future," says Spector of the decision to set the game some 20 years after the events of the original. *Invisible War* would use a confused combination of all three of the original's endings for the setup of the sequel.

2

UNIFIED AMMO
Each weapon throughout *Invisible War* uses the same ammunition, which was another feature that Spector warned Smith against implementing. The nanotechnology explanation was baloney and players found the likes of rocket launchers and pistols sharing rounds ultimately jarring.

3

FACTION CHANGES
"By letting you change factions any time you wanted, it made your factional choice irrelevant… [it] had no consequences and that completely undercut the whole point of *Deus Ex*. People thought it was a game about players making choices but it was not – it was a game about players dealing with the consequences of their choices.

in Dallas, which worried some of the co-founders. "I heard news of strange things from some of the artists that moved from the Dallas office to Warren's Austin team," Romero tells **games™**. "I didn't really care what was going on in Austin since it was Warren's kingdom and he could rule it however he wanted. Two of my co-founders wanted to shut down the Austin studio because of these crazy reports, but I told them no – we are going to stick with Warren because that might be the kind of process he uses to get great things done. We don't know, and I didn't want to mess it up. My co-founders tried multiple times to shut down the Austin office, but I refused to disturb Warren. However Warren works, whatever kind of process it entails, at the end there is a great game. I held to my belief and kept the Austin studio alive."

▀▀▀ SPECTOR PUT THE team through their paces, dispensing with established tropes such as hidden dice rolls and implementing dynamic reactive AI, all while using the original Unreal engine, which Spector says was "kind of hacked" – at the time it was predominantly utilised for first-person shooters. With Eidos stumping up the cash and Ion Storm's reputation for frittering away funds, the publisher, wary about the creative direction, cast a watchful eye over the production.

"I don't even want to tell you how many times folks at Eidos tried to tell me to do stuff," says Spector. "I'll never forget one

■ "They ripped us off!" says Warren Spector on his first thoughts when watching *The Matrix* back in 1999 during *Deus Ex*'s development. It was only later that he realised that both were tapping into the same prophetic themes.
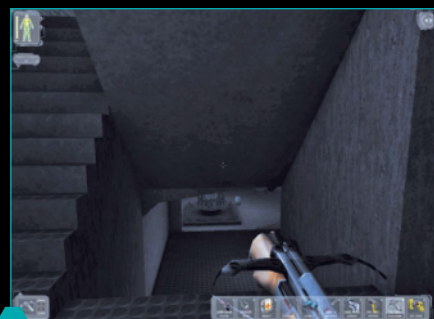
■ The game remains challenging to this day, with separate hit points and a brutal health meter. The difficulty level certainly encouraged players to take a light-footed approach to missions.

conversation where the publishing committee at Eidos asked me 'what percentage of your players are going to sneak through this game?' And I said 'honestly, based on my experience, it's going to be about 20 to 30 per cent and other people are just going to play it like a shooter.' And they said 'well just make a shooter then! Why are you spending any money on something that 70 or 80 per cent of your players don't care about?'"

Luckily Romero kept to his word and Spector and the rest of the team escaped the thrifty gaze of the publisher. This unprecedented liberty not only enabled Ion Storm to craft the story they wanted to tell but also enabled quirks in the design that imbued the game with an incomparable sense of freedom. It wasn't so much a case of taking augmented counter-terrorist agent JC Denton down either route A or B, but discovering an uncharted route C.

"I'm still to this day frankly amazed at the solutions to problems players come up with," says Spector of players who strolled off the beaten track and discovered alternative

"OUR [ENDING WAS INELEGANT] BECAUSE WE COULDN'T THINK OF ANYTHING BETTER"

methods to complete objectives. "The whole point of *Deus Ex* was to sort of institutionalise the idea that it's not about how clever and creative we are as designers and developers, but it's how clever and creative players are in using our tools. The way you identify success in a game like this is when players do something you don't expect." During testing, they found that players started to exploit design constraints – a discovery that thrilled the team. One such exploitation involved stacking LAM (Lightweight Attack Munitions) against a wall to create routes outside of the map. "Oh my God, you wouldn't believe the guys at Eidos," groans Spector. "They all thought, 'it's a bug – you've got to fix it!' Our response was 'no that's not a bug – that's exactly what we want.' I think it was Steve Powers who came up with 'well, let's just put crates and ladders outside our game maps, so if they get out they can climb back in.'"

These fundamental design choices were at the service of player freedom, which ultimately culminated in the moment players had to decide for themselves how the game

WEATHERING THE ION SHITSTORM

HOW DEUS EX OVERCAME ITS DEVELOPER'S INNER STRUGGLES

■ The visuals could never be classed as cutting edge, even for the time. Somehow, the William Gibson, *Blade Runner* and *Ghost In The Shell* influences shone through the rather clunky presentation.

■ The game uses several real-world locations as epicentres to major terrorist operations. The opening mission drops players on Liberty Island, wherein the player must infiltrate the decapitated Statue Of Liberty to interrogate a target.

JOHN ROMERO'S ABOUT TO MAKE YOU HIS BITCH.

EIDOS   Suck It Down.

John Romero was at the top of his game during the Nineties – that game being a ferocious first-person shooter called *Quake*. And then *Daikatana* happened. While Warren Spector and his team toiled away at Ion Storm's Austin-based offices, the Dallas headquarters found themselves in the midst of a PR nightmare.

Daikatana, at the height of its hype, took an unusual approach to marketing. An ad for the game declared "John Romero's about to make you his bitch. Suck it down." The idea of putting Romero at the forefront of the marketing had some merit, but the tactless approach rubbed fans up the wrong way.

"Oh, I definitely regret those marketing decisions, and apologised for the debacle in an interview with Gamesauce last year. The marketing director on the Ion Storm side made all kinds of controversial decisions like running image adverts that just had our faces in them, his too of course, and no games, the infamous Bitch ad (invented by The Richards Group), and other ridiculous stuff," Romero tells **games**™. "The Austin office definitely thought there was a screw loose up in Dallas and they were right. After the Dallas office closed, the Austin office decided they wanted to change the name of the studio, but Warren kept it alive. Warren has great integrity."

It may have caused Romero undue frustration, but the ever-ebullient Warren Spector didn't take the campaign quite so seriously. "I was embarrassed about it but it never worried me particularly," he says. "My attitude about all this is that games are important and I love them, but at the end of the day we're just making games. We're not curing cancer, we're not solving world hunger problems and we're not bringing world peace. We're making videogames."

would end. Determining the fate of JC Denton was channelled into one of three shades of morally grey as the player had the choice of allying Denton with one of three menacing factions. It was a narrative punctuation that had a lasting effect on its audience due to a simple choice.

"I'm sitting here grinning and laughing because I look back on *Deus Ex* and think how inelegant our solution was then because we couldn't think of anything better," says Spector. "You really do own the step-by-step, minute-to-minute gameplay, but it's a completely linear game. Every single player does exactly the same things, which is why I think the story was as powerful as it was. We got to the last mission and we said 'which door will he choose?' It was *The Lady, or the Tiger?* (the classic short story). There are three doors and you pick which one you

want. The weakness of the short story and many games that followed is that the door is random; it's just 'let's make a deal.' In *Deus Ex* we asked you to stop and think which door do you think makes sense."

The lasting success and legacy of *Deus Ex* speaks for itself: it contributed to the proliferation of cyberpunk media, spawned two sequels and won multiple awards. Spector doesn't regret any of the choices he made. Each decision had a formative ramification on the game that ultimately determined its identity. "I think that tension really did work in a way," he reflects. "I told people then that everybody needs to chill, because in years to come everyone is going to look back on this and say we did something special. Everyone is going to forget the bad stuff and remember that we did something special."

■ Publisher Eidos suggested making *Deus Ex* a straight FPS, but Romero and Spector stuck to their guns.

WHY I ♥...

Deus Ex

DAVID JAFFE, BARTLET JONES
SUPERNATURAL DETECTIVE AGENCY

❝ *I would say my pure favourite game of all time is probably* Deus Ex*. I think it's just the most immersive videogame I've played and it's the only game I've played that really made me feel like the Holodeck could be possible. There are moments in that game where everything comes together and it feels like it's folding itself around your choices, like you're actually in that world. Even though there are better-looking and better-playing games today, that remains one of the few games that has done that for me in a way that made me feel genuinely transported – like, 'Holy shit, I could live in this world and never want to leave'. The second one I got very bored with very quickly – I played it long enough to know that I loved the storytelling and thought that was brilliant but the rest of it? I got bored and didn't finish it. And with* Human Revolution, *very early on I got to a point that I could not get past - I'm like 'What the fuck am I doing wrong?' and I haven't gone back to it. It didn't feel like the same game. I heard it was good but it didn't feel like I was playing a proper* Deus Ex. ❞

MJ12 Troop: Nope.   Just nerves, I guess.

AMMO
27

0

CLIPS

1
2

ASSAULT   LOCKPICK

"There are moments in that game where everything comes together and it feels like it's folding itself around your choices"

DAVID JAFFE, BARTLET JONES SUPERNATURAL DETECTIVE AGENCY

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: COLD WAR CRISIS

Open-ended and ridiculously ambitious, Bohemia Interactive takes us behind the scenes on the FPS that busted out of linear corridors to show off military warfare in open terrain

WHEN MAREK ŠPANĚL was a teenager, he was arrested by Communist soldiers. Cycling close to the Czech border, where the Iron Curtain separated the satellite states of the Soviet Union from the Western world, his presence was missed by one of the local patrols. He mistakenly strayed into restricted territory near the border, which in Communist Czechoslovakia could reach several hundred-metres wide. Shortly after, he was accosted by an army officer.

"He just shouted at me and asked the soldiers to arrest me and ask me what I was doing there so close to the Iron Curtain – whether I wanted to go to the West," Španěl says. "So I said no and he checked all my personal belongings and found a map. He said 'but you have a map! That's very suspicious. What did you have the map for', so I said 'I'm riding a bicycle, so I'm just using it for navigation'."

The officer marched Španěl home, escorted by soldiers brandishing machine guns. "My parents were scared, of course. Everyone thought I'd done something really bad, but it was not the case."

Aside from a fright, nothing more came of Španěl's brush with the border patrol, but he uses the anecdote to highlight the tensions that defined the surroundings of his upbringing during the Cold War's closing years. "We'd been listening to the voices of the America and we thought Ronald Reagan was a big hero. We really adored Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, they were real heroes for us. We lived in a strange world."

Years later, as founder and co-owner of Bohemia Interactive, this strange world became a central theme of the game that made Bohemia internationally famous, *Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis*.

Released in 2001, *Operation Flashpoint* was insanely ambitious and insanely successful. It offered large-scale, open-ended, combined-arms combat across three massive islands at a time when the majority of shooters were still confined to linear corridors. It sold well over a million copies and continued to sell strongly for the next four years. It even spawned a modding community that, incredibly, is still active thirteen years later. It resulted in not one, but two series of sequels, and is now regarded

as the defining example of the military-simulation genre. All this was created by a development team, which at its largest consisted of just twelve people.

Thematically, *Flashpoint* was inspired by a world very different from what we're used to, but in terms of concept and technology its influences are more familiar. Španěl cites examples such as the planetary flight simulator, *Rescue On Fractalus*. Developed by Lucasfilm Studios (later LucasArts) in 1985, *Fractalus* involved saving marooned space pilots who'd crashed on a mountainous planet, procedurally generated using fractals. Another major influence was the 1988 Atari ST game *Carrier Command*, which Bohemia Interactive would go on to remake 24 years later.

The Atari ST was the first console Španěl developed for, creating a hovercraft-simulator game called *Gravon*. *Flashpoint* was originally conceived as a follow-up game to *Gravon*, codenamed *Poseidon*. "[The] original concept was a completely free-roam vehicular action game where things like fuel and fuel stations played an important role," Španěl explains. "Fuel management was one of the things that you had to take care of."

For a long time, infantry combat didn't appear on *Poseidon*'s radar, and when Španěl eventually decided to include it, the result was a far cry from the standard shooter model of the time. "Our initial character control was very much hovercraft-like. So it was a very big inertia of the character. Rotation was very slow, and we kind of felt it's a good thing because it's a simulator, and it's realistic in a sense."

Even the Cold War setting that defines so much of *Flashpoint*'s personality wasn't part of the original design. Instead, the game took place in a post-nuclear war where the majority of the world's landmass had been submerged by rising oceans. "There are only a few outstanding islands on the world where you could survive. Surprisingly, two big contingents of warships, of US and Soviets encounters themselves in this one island. It was called Eden." Španěl laughs at the memory. "Instead of joining forces and trying to survive, they just fought over this last piece of living world."

Flashpoint was always at its strongest when it brought all its elements together in a single mission.

THE FLASHPOINT TOUR GUIDE:

Operation Flashpoint's islands are still remarkable places to visit. Here's **games™**'s handy guide for the virtual tourist

EVERON:

The main map in *Operation Flashpoint* and the one most players will remember (Everon was also crucial to the plot, serving as the backdrop for most of the game). With its dense network of Evergreen forests and quaint rural villages, Everon makes for an ideal destination for the virtual hiker. The major towns include Montignac near the centre of the island, and Lamentin on the West coast, which is known for its impressive sunsets. Plane enthusiasts may find the airfield to the north of interest, while for history buffs a visit to the castle on the Southern coast is a must, although it is worth noting it may be occupied by Everon Resistance.

MALDEN:

Malden is the most Southern island in the chain, and consequently is privy to the warmest weather. This, combined with its pleasant harbour villages, make it an ideal place for beach and fishing holidays. Its largest towns are Larche, Saint Louis and La Trinite to the North West, and La Riviere in the South East. Malden is also NATO's base of operations in the area, meaning that there is plenty of opportunity for friendly conversation with American soldiers on shore leave. A few of the things that you should really watch out for include sunburn, mosquitoes, and the occasional Soviet invasion.
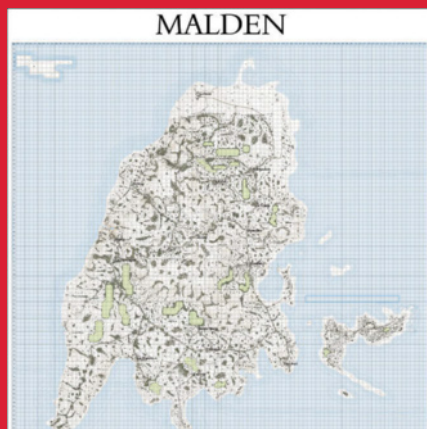
KOLGUJEV:

An arid volcanic wasteland with burned-out towns and nothing resembling human civilisation, Kolgujev is exactly like the real-life Tenerife. There are no large towns on the island, and the majority of the population resides within the many military bases hidden amid its foreboding, mountainous scrubland. Other notable inhabitants include political prisoners and the megalomaniacal General Guba, who lucky tourists may catch a fleeting glimpse of at his magnificent mansion, shortly before being executed for trespassing. What are you waiting for? It's a virtual paradise…

Traces of this idea can still be found in *Flashpoint*. Although Bohemia changed the setting to a real-world scenario, the idea of fighting on islands remained. Indeed, Eden is the military codename used by the American forces for Everon, the first of *Flashpoint*'s three islands.

These vast 3D environments were years ahead of the competition, several square kilometres in size, and sporting incredibly realistic terrain modelling. Like all of Bohemia's environments, *Flashpoint*'s islands were based on real-world locations. The evergreen Everon was based on the Croatian island of Krk. Mediterranean Malden was modelled on the Greek island of Lefkas, and the volcanic landscape of Kolgujev took its terrain data from Tenerife.

"We had no access to GIS data," Španěl says, "So we just took normal printed topographic maps, used a manual grid, and we took the contours and elevation data and created this map by hand. Then pretty much every single object was placed just by hand."

On top of these large and detailed environments, *Flashpoint* sported a forty-mission campaign, dozens of weapons and vehicles each individually modelled, and complex, coordinated team-based infantry combat. It was a tremendous undertaking. It was a huge amount of work for a team that at the time amounted to just six people. "We were very young and inexperienced. We felt anything was possible, basically. We felt there's no boundary that could stop us," Španěl jokes.

On a more serious note, Španěl points out several factors that made the task of building such a game more plausible than it might seem. The first is simple: time. Although Bohemia was a small developer, *Flashpoint* was made over the course of five years, far longer than the average turnaround for a game today.

The second is technology. Španěl notes that building a game like this 15 years ago was technically much less demanding than it is now. "All game assets were much lower fidelity than we are used to in these days, so producing a weapon or character model was nowhere near as complex as it is these days," he explains. "For example, back then you only had one colour texture, and you'd been very limited by polygons, so there was no need to use any advanced techniques like curved surfaces."

Further to that, the construction of *Flashpoint*'s large islands actually complemented the design process for a tactical shooter in a lot of ways. "In most of the games that were about characters back then, you had so-called levels, but we did not have levels. We had a large map and complete freedom to use it," Španěl
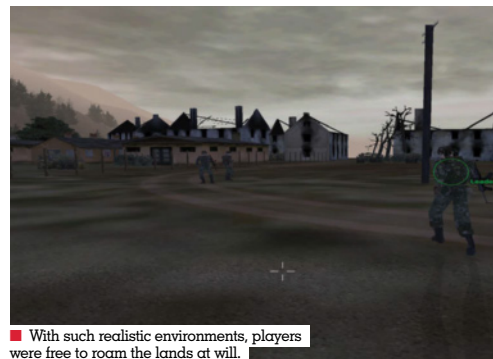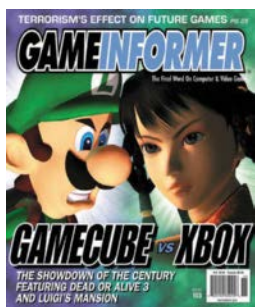
With such realistic environments, players were free to roam the lands at will.
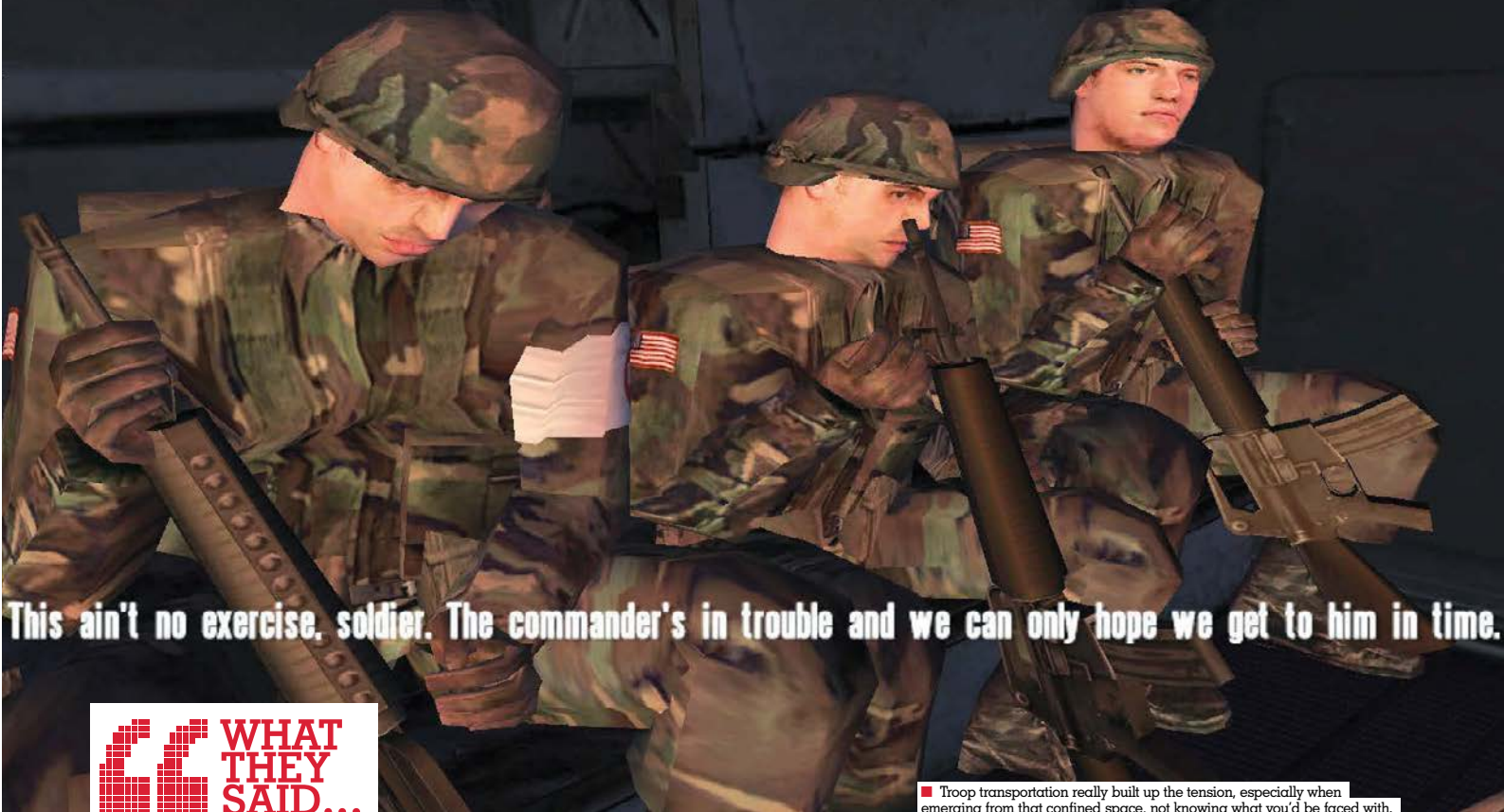
This ain't no exercise, soldier. The commander's in trouble and we can only hope we get to him in time.

■ Troop transportation really built up the tension, especially when emerging from that confined space, not knowing what you'd be faced with.

says. "So for a mission designer, this was really nice because you knew the map already, you'd been working on it for some time, so you could use it freely during mission process."

■■■ This is what enabled Bohemia to include such a complex campaign for *Flashpoint*. Again though, what players saw in the final version of the game was nothing like what the team originally had in mind. The initial concept for *Flashpoint*'s campaign was something much more procedural and persistent. It was almost like a military *Skyrim*, with patrols of soldiers from both sides prowling around. "After some time, maybe like six months, we realised it's really not that much fun, because sometimes the encounters were rare, so you just walked by and didn't do anything."

In the end, Bohemia abandoned this idea and instead designed the campaign around a more traditional framework of missions, which started you off as a rookie recruit in a training camp, and gradually introduced you to infantry combat, driving, special ops, tanks, and piloting helicopters and planes. "It was a long tutorial with all that the game offers," Španěl chuckles.

This is true enough, but it also does an injustice to the depth of *Flashpoint*'s campaign. Individual missions often had multiple layers, objectives would be added or altered as battles would lead to unforeseen consequences. A simple afternoon patrol could turn into a fearsome firefight with special Russian agents. A quiet night by the campfire might transform into a desperate rescue mission as an officer's convoy was ambushed

a mile down the road. The campaign even featured a branching storyline, the parameters of which were defined by the outcome of specific missions.

Furthermore, the fact that Bohemia had its setting in place before it started constructing the campaign allowed for a lot of creativity within these missions. "In some cases we had an idea how mission should

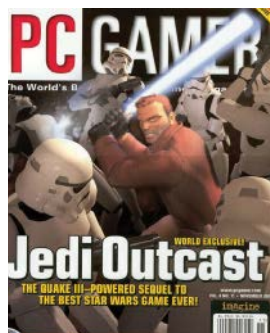**A SIMPLE AFTERNOON PATROL COULD TURN INTO A FEARSOME FIGHT WITH SPECIAL RUSSIAN AGENTS**

be structured, but more often we made many versions and attempts at what the mission could be like," Španěl explains. "That was one of the strengths of the game, the built-in mission editor. It was so easy to make a quick mission. So basically, the mission concept in the editor can be made in 15 minutes."

Despite the more standard structure, in parts, *Flashpoint*'s campaign approached the original design outline of something more procedural. The final mission was a huge, sprawling creation set across the entire island of Kolgujev, which saw the player controlling a huge special forces team tasked with tracking down the evil General Guba, the game's primary antagonist,

Speed 133   Alt. 127

Armor
Fuel
TOW   7

225   W 270   315   N 000   045   E 090   135   S 180

4: "ENGAGING"
Pilot (Sam Nichols): "TOW"
4: "ENGAGING"
4: "ENGAGING"
Pilot (Sam Nichols): "FIRE"
4: "ENGAGING"

100%
Target (188 m)
133   127

Leader (227 m)

■ *Flashpoint*'s helicopters are much easier to control than those of the *ArmA* games.

a dissident Russian general responsible for sparking the conflict with the Americans. "It was up to you to basically find the route he's chosen and stop him, arrest him or kill him, or else he could go through and launch the nuke," Španěl says.

Flashpoint even cottoned onto the appeal of survival gaming ten years before the likes of *Minecraft*. Several of the campaign's missions set you alone in enemy territory, with the objective of evading their patrols and traversing the game's sweeping terrain to a safe location. "I really like the mission where you had to find a way from the Soviet prison as the pilot. In previous mission you were shot down," Španěl enthuses.

Perhaps the best example of this, however, is the After Montignac mission. In what is arguably the game's most famous moment, it sees the rookie soldier David Armstrong alone in the woods after a disastrous assault on the town of Montignac, capital of Everon. With all his comrades killed in action, Armstrong must avoid the advancing enemy frontline, including tanks and helicopter flyovers, and make his way across the island to an encampment of Resistance soldiers.

How you accomplished this was entirely up to you, although one amusing approach was to steal a tractor from a nearby farm and gun it past the enemy patrols like a weaponised farmer. What's most interesting about After Montignac, however, is that it was actually one of the campaign's branching missions. "The other one was very rare, so most people played After Montignac," Španěl comments.

These missions were also important in *Flashpoint*'s portrayal of war. Its abrupt brutality and confusing absurdity were juxtaposed against the picturesque countryside that formed its battlegrounds. What's more, the game's dynamic combat systems and realistic representation of health and injury meant that nobody was safe in a *Flashpoint* mission. Whether ally, enemy, or yourself, death in *Flashpoint* was the same for everyone; quick, cold, and shocking. "I felt bad when I killed someone in the game," Španěl remarks simply.

The scale and originality of *Flashpoint* were what

I FELT BAD WHEN I KILLED SOMEONE IN THE GAME

made it initially so popular. What made it enduringly popular were the mission editor and the multiplayer. The former was the same editor that Bohemia used to create the campaign, and its easy-to-use interface created a bustling modding community that included huge websites like the Operation Flashpoint Editing Centre (OFPEC) and OPF.info, a site for downloading *Flashpoint* mods. These sites still exist today. OPF.info even features a new mod for *Flashpoint* created this year, adding Soviet Era Transport Vans to the game.

Španěl still bears fond memories of the *Flashpoint* modding community, who took the framework of Bohemia's creation and expanded it in many and varied ways. "I still remember this, probably my favourite mod for *Operation Flashpoint*," he recounts eagerly. "It was called *Lega Wars*. For legal reasons he couldn't call it Lego. Basically you had *Flashpoint* with Lego-style items, vehicles, soldiers, it was so much fun."
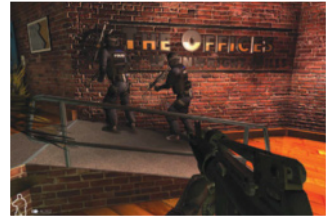
> A GAMING EVOLUTION Rainbow Six > Hidden and Dangerous > Swat 4

One of the first tactical shooters, *Rainbow Six*'s brutal difficulty and in-depth planning spawned a swathe of similar games.

Tactical FPS continued to be popular until around 2005, when cover-shooters like *Gears Of War* came into vogue.

■ Attending a medic was the only way to heal during combat, if you could bear being touched by the soldiers' freakish hands.

■ *Flashpoint*'s difficulty is generally overstated, but the Spec Ops missions were all punishingly tough.

■ Tank-spotting – train-spotting for adrenaline junkies.

■ No *Operation Flashpoint* article is complete without multiple references to the game's tractors.

Conversely, *Flashpoint*'s multiplayer is the one part of the game Španěl feels could have been done better. The initial release only featured a couple of basic maps, including a deathmatch map and capture the flag mission. Over time, the multiplayer grew in both quality and popularity, thanks to regularly released patches and the major expansions *Red Hammer* and *Resistance*, alongside community contributions – but it never quite amounted to how Španěl envisioned it.

"There's been so much we wanted to do with multiplayer. So probably *Flashpoint Online*, that's something I regret the most not making, because there was the idea of making a persistent online game for *Flashpoint*. We've never managed to do it, and we focused on the console version instead, which I think was mistake, but back then we thought this good idea."

Operation Flashpoint was enormously successful, both for Bohemia Interactive and the game's publisher, Codemasters, but the success didn't mean a happy ending for the relationship between the two. At the time, Španěl was frustrated by some of Codemasters' actions, such as putting software on the *Flashpoint* disk at the last minute without telling Bohemia.

Thirteen years on, he has mellowed somewhat and admits there were problems on both sides. Bohemia, in his eyes, was very much an indie developer. Ambitious and unconventional, but also unreliable in terms of deadlines, and not always easy to work with. The relationship with Codemasters was formed out of necessity rather than desire. "There was pretty much no way of releasing the game digitally, and there was no way to reach the users without publisher," he says. "So, that made it hard because we always really wanted to be direct with the users, we did not like going much through the middle man, so I think it was probably pretty hard for Codemasters as well."

Yet there is one instance from that era which clearly still stings for Španěl, and that's Codemasters' contractual retention of the *Flashpoint* trademark, and its decision to develop a sequel internally. "When we

signed the contract, we never thought – there have been some clauses, but we thought it's mostly to ensure that if we make a sequel, they have some rights to publish it," he explains. "But after few years with the game being so successful, they decided to make it on their own. We never thought about this being even possible, remotely."

After *Flashpoint* and the split with Codemasters, Bohemia struggled financially for several years, saved from bankruptcy only by a rushed release of the first *Armed Assault*, which Španěl describes as a "rescue operation". Ironically, these problems were partly caused by *Flashpoint*'s success. Since Bohemia's ridiculously ambitious creation had paid off dividends, they decided to make the spiritual successor, known internally as *Game 2*, even more ambitious. So ambitious, in fact, that 13 years and three games later, Bohemia still hasn't implemented all the ideas it had for *Game 2*.

Like *Flashpoint*, *Game 2* was supposed to feature three islands. Two of these are the landscapes features in *ArmA 2* and *ArmA 3*, namely Chernarus and Altis, and the third environment is still yet to made. Moreover, Game 2 would include open-world military role-playing, resource management, and player requirements for food and other necessities. It would even sport fully destructible environments. "We originally wanted to make it all in three years," Španěl says, laughing. "After many years we managed to make some of it."

That Bohemia has spent a decade and a half trying to make the sequel it deems worthy of *Flashpoint* shouldn't be seen as a failure. Rather, it's a testament to the brilliance of the original.
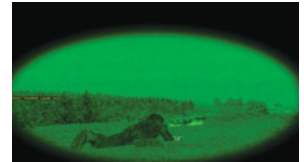
■ Tanks for the memory!
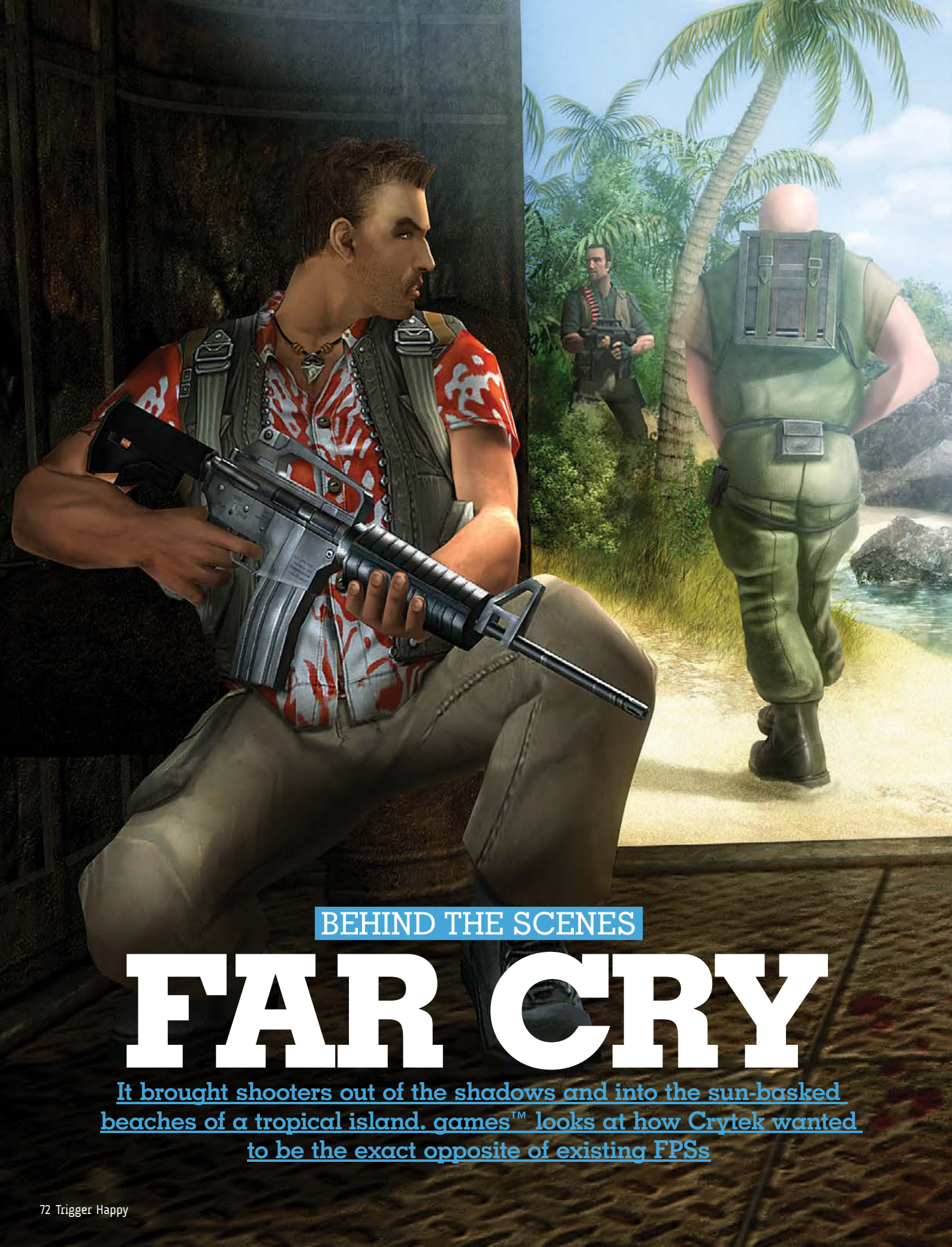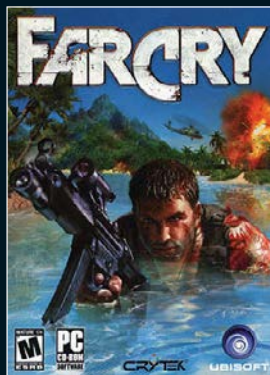
FAR CRY

It brought shooters out of the shadows and into the sun-basked beaches of a tropical island. games™ looks at how Crytek wanted to be the exact opposite of existing FPSs

■ Cevat Yerli wanted *Far Cry* to have a mix of indoor and outdoor scenes to allow the player to explore.

Released: 2004
Format: PC
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Crytek
Key Staff: Cevat Yerli (founder), Jack Mamais (design producer), Christopher Natsuume (lead producer), Richard Tsao (multiplayer producer), Chris Auty (designer)

■ **IT HAS BEEN** almost nine years since Cevat Yerli released *Far Cry* but a good 16 since the seeds of that game were planted. Yerli was already showing signs of being a good programmer – he created a game called *Trader* for the Amstrad CPC 6128 and he went on to produce *Moi-Thai* for the C64 – but in 1996 he played a game that would change his life forever. That game was *Quake*.

Before *Quake*, the games he loved to play and the games he loved to make were very different. Although he made games based around economics and martial arts, he preferred to play strategy and football titles, *Kick Off* being a particular favourite. "I actually never liked to make the games that I played for fun," Yerli declares. "Until I discovered *Quake*."

"*Quake* became for me a fundamental decision maker," he added. "I actually skipped the whole *Doom* thing – it just never clicked with me. But *Quake* did. I began to become interested in the modding scene and the communities around *Quake* and I really enjoyed it. It inspired me so I started to assemble a team across the internet, bringing together communities of members and programmers and kick-started Crytek. *Quake* led to the fact that we made *Far Cry*."

Cevat Yerli started the ball rolling for what would become Crytek in 1997 but the company wasn't established for a further two years. During that time, the team of 40 or so professional programmers and graphic artists he had assembled online had been producing games, including a demo which was called *X-Isle: Dinosaur Island*. "I showed this to my brothers, Faruk and Anvi, and said we should go to

the some trade shows with it," Yerli recalls. "We went to E3 in 1999 and met with NVIDIA. We had 15 minutes to show off what we had, but our meeting ended up taking two hours. They liked *X-Isle* and we did a deal. I could then hire real people for the first time."

X-Isle became an educational demo. It made use of the GeForce3 nfiniteFX engine to create a truly expansive outdoor *Jurassic Park*-like environment rendered in real-time. It evolved with detailed vast landscapes populated by dinosaurs realistically interacting together, real-time lighting and progressive mesh technology. It enabled Crytek to have massive scenes with more than 50 skeletal animated dinosaurs walking through at once, but it also enabled NVIDIA to show off its hardware capabilities.

But that wasn't the end of it. Yerli was keen to build upon *X-Isle* and turn it into a commercial triple-A game. The company signed a deal with Ubisoft and, in 2001, the Crytek team took all of their expertise and experience and began to develop the OpenGL-driven CryEngine upon which *Far Cry* would be built.

Even then, however, the end result wasn't entirely clear. Yerli and his team kept shifting their focus and there was much chopping and changing: "We had this idea of a game of multiple aliens fighting it out as a multiplayer game," Yerli recalls. "We then killed the aliens and stuck with just humans, still multiplayer, and then we went from this multiplayer with humans only into single-player with aliens. And then we removed the aliens again and then we made a game with mutants. And this happened all in three years. So we really did three games in three years."

> # I WAS IMPRESSED WITH THE TECHNOLOGY OF THE CRYENGINE RIGHT FROM THE START

■■■ **WHAT WAS EMERGING**, however, was an FPS, but not one that shoehorned players down claustrophobic corridors, pausing at corners, awaiting whatever may decide to appear in front or, more frighteningly, from behind. Crytek was creating sunny beaches where the sea lapped against the sand. It was inviting, it was expansive and it looked luxurious. Like a breath of fresh sea air, it was taking the FPS into the wide and beautiful world.
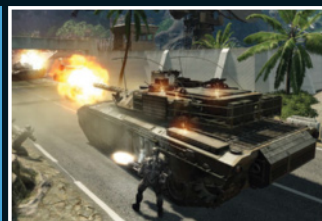
>. A GAMING EVOLUTION   Quake > Far Cry >Crysis

Cevat Yerli loved *Quake* and, for the first time, he wanted to develop a game that he had enjoyed playing himself.
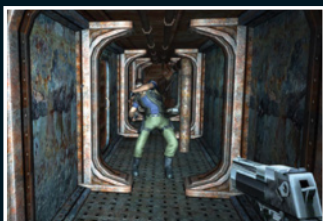
Crytek didn't make the sequels to *Far Cry*. Instead it went on to produce *Crysis*, which was released in 2007.

THE TURNING POINT

■ WHEN YERLI and his brothers showed their game to NVIDIA at E3 in 1999, a group of 20 journalists had wandered by and expressed how much they liked what they had seen. It helped to persuade NVIDIA to do a deal with Crytek, although its representatives had also been impressed.

That original demo disc had such an impact on the growth of Crytek and on the future of first-person shooters that it currently resides in the Video Game Museum of Rome where, since July this year, it has been on display permanently. The museum's director, Marco Accordi Rickards, says he is

happy at the addition: "Crytek represents the state of the art of games. Their first original demo disc is a priceless new item for our museum."

The disc is one of more than 440 exhibits tracing the origins of gaming. It also has an interactive history section with 36 game machines.

WHAT THEY SAID...

"What we wanted really was to make *Quake* an island," says Yerli. "And then we changed it into a story game with a guy in a red shirt swimming around an island." *Far Cry* is well known for having a flimsy plot but Yerli is unrepentant. "Back then, people really didn't care too much about a story. It really was about the basic conception of where you were," he said. "It was also about who you could shoot effectively so it was an island with some crazy mercenaries and then we added this fictional layer to it with Dr Krieger who had this research going on and mutants and super soldiers and all the rest of it."

Christopher Natsuume remembers this period well. He was the game's lead producer, brought on board to help with the design and direction of the product. He was needed to give the game greater focus, mixing stealth and action and giving the player control over where to go, what to do and how to attack enemies. He took inspiration from *Die Hard*, *Rambo* and *Apocalypse Now*.

"All of the FPS games were doing dark, gritty and industrial and the deal we signed with Ubisoft was based on the *X-Isle* demo that Cevat and a
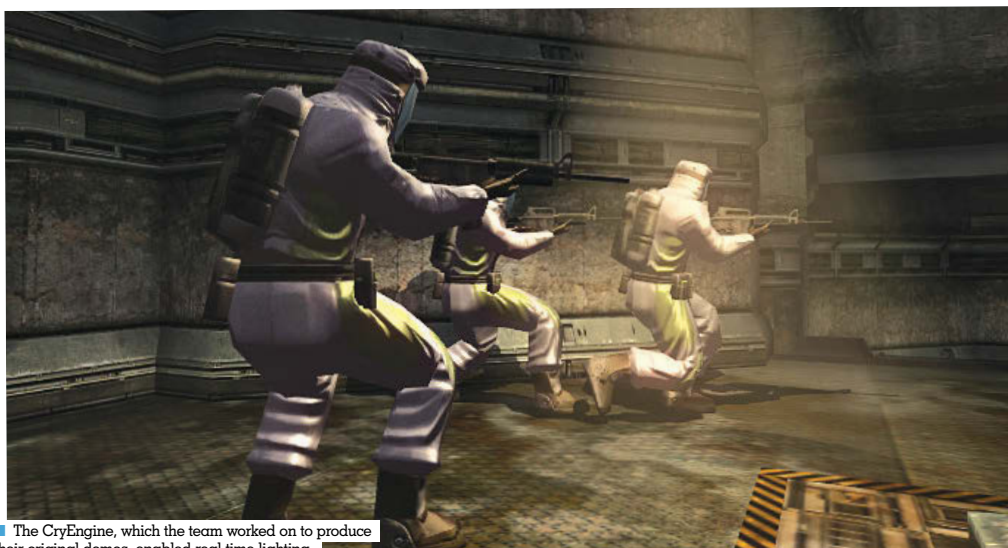
few others made which was all about dinosaurs on a tropical island. I came into the project well after they dropped the dinos but they still had the tropical island and that was my basis to work on."

One of the key features Yerli had insisted upon was a one-kilometre view. "Long-range gameplay was one of a few key features Cevat felt defined the game and set it apart," says Natsuume. The idea was that the game would be more interesting, and provide more tactical freedom, if you could see long ranges and make decisions based on that. This proved to be more or less true."

Production was hard going. There were lots of late nights at Crytek's studios and many arguments about what should be going into the game. "The hardest part, honestly, was getting people to buy into the idea of what we were trying to do with our AI," says Natsuume, of artificial intelligence that allowed the unscripted enemy to sense you and then hunt you down, as well as become bored and do their own thing. "The thinking at the time was that a heavily scripted, cinematic AI would get you 'wow scenes' – moments that looked like moments from movies."

CEVAT YERLI
Founder

Treading a fine line between jaw-dropping realism and high-res synthetic sheen, you can't help but be impressed by the composition of the environments, and if your PC is speedy enough then you're in for a real treat.

games™
Issue 17, April 2004

■ The CryEngine, which the team worked on to produce their original demos, enabled real-time lighting.

■■■ "PEOPLE WANTED THE camera just so and the action just so in these moments – but what we were doing was trying to let the player develop their own 'wow scenes' through free-roaming gameplay, where what you did actually drove the AI actions. These two philosophies were largely at odds and we had a hell of a time convincing people that it was more interesting to let the AI drive themselves logically and see what came out of that than to script specific moments in the game."

As time went on, the design for the single-player game was deemed to need even greater focus and Jack Mamais was brought in as design producer. His job was to improve the missions and he came aboard around a year before the game shipped – when, he says, it was still in a very rough pre-alpha stage.

"I was super impressed with the technology of the CryEngine right from the start," he says. "The programmers and artists had produced the best environments I had ever seen in any game but the design at that time was rather weak. Most of the missions were doing essentially the same thing and the moment to moment experience had not really been defined yet.

"We created a new type of process called 'the pit' where Peter Kotevski, the AI programmer, myself, and the level designer of each mission would sit in the motion capture room and work together to hammer out the specifics of each mission. Peter was awesome and instrumental in making each mission work."

Yerli had some strict desires. He had examined the many successful shooters that had been launched and wanted the exact opposite of them. He wanted pseudo open-world gameplay rather than linear, although he wanted to retain bunkers, caves, tunnels and compounds. It meant that *Far Cry*, despite coming out of nowhere, was able to rival the likes of *Doom 3*.

The arsenal was another key part of the game. "The weapon choice was already in place when I started but I really enjoyed the P-90 – it rocked," says Mamais. Natsuume agrees. "The long-range gameplay part of the game favoured long-range, high-effect weapons like the sniper rifle," he says. "But first-person shooters tend to have pretty much the same stuff: a pistol, an assault rifle, grenades,

■ *Far Cry* established Crytek as world leaders when it came to graphics in contemporary videogames.

a rocket launcher. I think most people have a favourite weapon based on the way they like to play."

■■■ THE FACT THAT the game was still far from complete with a year to go was symptomatic of the organic process the game had gone through although the CryEdit tool made creating larger environments easier. "We kept throwing things against the wall to see if they stuck," said Mamais. "We had a few more mutants in the game originally and some of them got dropped. We also got rid of a few missions and scenarios that either did not work or were beyond the scope of the project."

Some decisions proved controversial when the game came to be reviewed and played. The save-game feature was frustrating at times since the decision was made to only save at certain thresholds. "That was 100 per cent my fault, and my call," says Natsuume. "The thinking at the time was that if you allowed a save game at any moment, people would not see how the AI responded differently to different situations – because they would not replay the situations. Time and experience… I think in the end that was the wrong call."

Still, the game reviewed well and players loved what the CryEngine had helped to bring to the gaming table. While the sequels ended up being open-world survivalist adventures, the original was an involving shooter that pushed the boundaries of technology, was amazing to look at and played with very few flaws. It managed to combine this with levels of a size that was unprecedented for the time. With *Far Cry*, the individual approach was at the centre of how the game played out.

"What Crytek really did for me was convince me that you could start something from scratch – and you could build a truly international, independent studio that could do great things," says Natsuume who left Crytek after *Far Cry* to start Boomzap.

As for Yerli, he is understandably proud of what he and his team achieved. "For us, it's about pushing the limits and sometimes you can look at what others do and become disheartened when they achieve what you thought was not possible," he says. "But the irony is many years later when we did *Far Cry* I heard how other pros were disheartened by it and said they wanted to quit their jobs because they couldn't reach this quality any more. But they can. We can all aspire to push the limits."

CHRIS NATSUUME
Lead producer
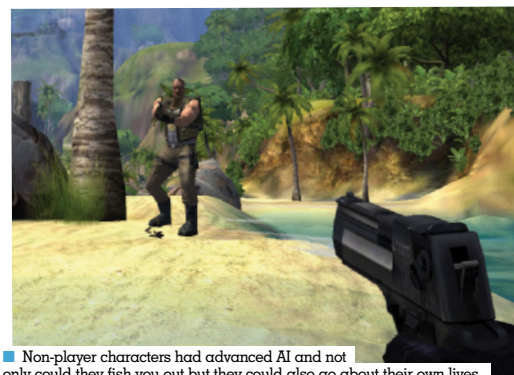
■ Non-player characters had advanced AI and not only could they fish you out but they could also go about their own lives.

Posted by:
SHINYMCSHINE
■ I'm not the greatest fan of FPS games and I am pretty useless with keyboard/mouse combination when trying to play them but I did play *Far Cry* (PC) for a while. It took me a while to get the hang of the controls but the early stages of the game were pretty impressive as far as I can remember, when you were mostly taking out human opponents. The bit on the boat was particularly good. It was by the time I got deeper into the jungle, with the "cloaked" aliens where my interest wandered off.

Posted by:
RETRO 74
■ I've never played it, PC only wasn't it? It's one of those series that I will never play now like *Crysis*, just not comfortable starting with number 2. When they bring a PC series to console they should always include a port of the earlier game for weirdos like me. *[Note, an Xbox Live Arcade port is said to be on its way]*.

Posted by:
RICHARDJONES129
■ For me, *Far Cry* was a breath of fresh air and it shook up the shooter genre. I liked the way it was so expansive and didn't seem to restrict players. This is definitely one of the best games I've played.

■ *Far Cry* grew into an FPS from its origins as a tech demo with dinosaurs.

■ *Far Cry* had lots of outdoor action, freeing the player from the cramped, corridor-based play of many shooters.

HALF-LIFE 2

Released: 2004 **Publisher:** Valve **System:** PC

The physics in *Half-Life 2* are superb, and you will often use the environment to take down enemies. Fuel drums are a little more important than usual, then.

HEALTH 88   SUIT 38   AMMO 6   23

Every month **games™** looks back at some of the most influential videogames of all time. This month we see how Valve's revolutionary sequel to Half-Life helped shape the future of first-person shooters

WHEN VALVE ANNOUNCED a sequel to its hit shooter *Half-Life* at E3 in May 2003, the gaming world predictably went nuts. In addition to impressing with an amazing new game engine called Source, Valve was revealing a sequel to one of the most important first-person shooters of all time. Expectations seemed to be impossibly high, but once Valve's magnum opus was released some 18 months later, it not only met the lofty hopes of gamers everywhere, but smashed them with yet another landmark videogame.

Valve had once again set a new standard for the popular genre, a standard which is still being felt in today's games. *BioShock Infinite*, *Homefront*, *Resistance 3* and *Dishonored* are just a few of the titles to share DNA with Valve's impressive sequel, and developers continue to cite *Half-Life 2* and its own groundbreaking predecessor as essential when it comes to implementing narrative into games. This stylish storytelling technique is rampant in *Half-Life 2*,

and has done so well that it's not even necessary to have played the original game. Subtle narration fills you in on all the key points of the original, so a player can be as disorientated as protagonist Gordon Freeman when he first makes his appearance and still know what's going on.

Some might say that Valve had it easy because it was essentially building on the groundwork it had lain down with the excellent *Half-Life*. That's not really fair, however. Valve isn't the sort of company to rest on its laurels, and it pushed every aspect of the original game to deliver a title that, nearly a decade on, still manages to enthral those who play it.

This in part is down to the Source engine itself, a highly polished piece of coding that's still heavily in use today. There's a cleanness and slickness to Valve's engine that is consistently impressive, regardless of how it has to scale. Valve even managed a perfectly solid port on the original Xbox, admittedly with lengthy loading times and an

HALF-LIFE 2: BEFORE AND AFTER | THE GAMES THAT SHARE DNA WITH VALVE'S HIT GAME
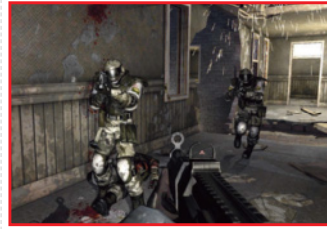

HALF-LIFE

★ Valve's industry-defining shoot-'em-up was a world away from the likes of *Doom* and *Quake*, providing gamers with more than just enemies to shoot at. It introduced many key game mechanics to the genre and proved you didn't need expansive cut-scenes to tell an incredibly polished story.
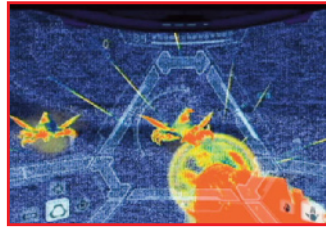
METROID PRIME

★ Although *Metroid Prime* has plenty of guns in it, like *Half-Life 2* it was anything but a conventional shooter. Its greatest achievement was converting the 2D essence of the *Metroid* series to the third dimension, but its beautifully detailed environments are what really link it to Valve's shooter.

F.E.A.R.

★ Like *Half-Life 2*, Monolith's *F.E.A.R.* proved that it was possible to make survival-based horror and wrap it around a first-person shooter. It takes the concept further than Valve did, but remembers that it's atmosphere and not just gory shocks that should drive a story forward.

BIOSHOCK INFINITE

★ *BioShock* builds on both *Half-Life 2* and the likes of *System Shock 2* by delivering believable characters and an achingly gorgeous world. It's arguably one of the greatest modern day examples of story narration, and features brilliant AI in the form of Elizabeth, the girl you have to rescue.

occasionally erratic frame rate. Revisit *Half-Life 2* today, and it remains a spectacularly good-looking game, and while its textures might not be as detailed as more recent games (there's nearly a decade's gulf in technology after all), it's surprising how good it still looks. It's most notable in the lighting (which was substantially improved in *Half-Life 2*'s two episodic sequels) and the many characters you meet, including Alyx; one of the most realistic and believable characters we've ever encountered in a videogame.

■■■ THE MOST STUNNING aspect of *Half-Life 2*, however, is how realistic everything felt. This in part was due to the dynamic lighting, but the environments were also stunning pieces of work that felt utterly believable as you explored them. There are no pointless dead ends in *Half-Life 2*, invisible walls are largely absent (Valve simply blocks off areas it doesn't want you to go with suitable objects) and every building you go into appears to have a distinct purpose. Every single inch of the game world, styled on a dystopian Eastern Europe, feels completely real as if it's a place from a long forgotten time that members of Valve has visited. It's alien but also recognisable, and you can't help but want to explore every bit of it. Exploring does highlight

HALF-LIFE 2 IS AS MUCH ABOUT THE ADVENTURE AS SHOOTING ENEMIES

KEY FACTS

■ *Half-Life 2* was built using Valve's Source Engine. The adaptable engine made its debut with *Counter-Strike: Source* and has been used in every Valve game since.

■ Alyx Vance is voiced by Merle Dandridge, a theatre performer in *Spamalot* and *Rent*. If her voice sounds familiar you've probably heard it in the excellent *The Last Of Us* as Marlene.

■ Valve was involved in a legal battle with Vivendi Universal over the distribution rights of *Half-Life 2* in cyber cafes. A settlement was agreed with Vivendi losing the right to distribute Valve's games.

the fact that *Half-Life 2* is actually very linear, but as with the best games, it cleverly tricks you into thinking the opposite, and that you're instead inside an epic believable world and not just traipsing down predetermined corridors.

This bait and switch continues with the excellent gameplay, which continues to play with conventions. On the surface it appears to be a straightforward first-person shooter, but in reality it's so much more. Like its predecessor, *Half-Life 2* is as much about the adventure as it is about shooting down enemies, and while it has a variety of satisfying weaponry (most notably the game-changing Gravity Gun), they should be seen more as tools designed to deal with each new challenge that Valve throws at you. Most enemies can be dealt with in a number of different ways, and you'll often find yourself experimenting and discovering new methods of dealing with past locations you've visited before.

Puzzles are also rife in *Half-Life 2*, and really come to the fore once you've acquired the aforementioned Gravity Gun. They're not as elaborate as those promised in the E3 video, but you'll still find yourself scratching your head. You'll also marvel at just how much variety can be found, especially when it starts straying into other genres (driving, survival horror, squad-based shooting) and pulls them off with little effort. *Half-Life 2* may have been a relatively rough ride for Valve during development (at one point the FBI was called in after parts of the source code were leaked), but you'd never tell from the final product. It's as finely crafted a videogame that you'll ever come across, and deserves every piece of acclaim it has received. When the G-Man states during the E3 reveal that "We've been rather busy in your absence, Mr Freeman," he certainly wasn't lying.

HALF-LIFE 2:
DEFINING MOMENTS

VALVE'S SCI-FI SEQUEL REMAINS AN ASTONISHING GAME NEARLY A DECADE AFTER ITS RELEASE. WE REVEAL THE MOMENTS THAT WILL STAY WITH YOU FOREVER

ALYX

■ *BIOSHOCK INFINITE*'S ELIZABETH may be the new benchmark for AI in videogames, but Alyx beat her to the punch by a good nine years. Cleverly scripted and surprisingly realistic, you genuinely miss the moments when she's not around, and the adventure always picks up when she's there. The touching moments she has with Dog and father are genuinely charming, while her intelligence and well-animated expressions set her a world apart from the portrayal of women in other videogames.

THE CHOPPER

■ EARLY ON IN *Half-Life 2* you're attacked by a persistent Hunter-Chopper. It follows you across several stages, causing you to scramble to safety whenever you're in an open space, or simply go underground to avoid it. Valve occasionally allows you to have a breather, but it always brings the huge gunship back at the most inopportune moments. It's not until you gain access to a gun-mounted hovercraft that you finally have the means to take the damned thing down, making its final demise that much sweeter.

RAVENHOLM

■ EVERY ASPECT OF Ravenholm is superb, with Valve distilling the entire survival horror genre into two of the tightest gaming hours you'll ever experience. Highlights include using buzz saws to decapitate zombies or crushing them with elaborate traps. Its highlight, however, is arguably your last final desperate race across the city's roofs and its ominous graveyard. Fast zombies surround you from all sides, with only the rattling of nearby drainpipes giving you any indication of where they will attack next.
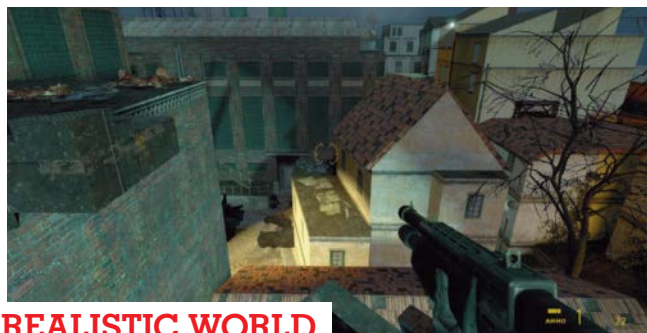
REALISTIC WORLD

■ ONE OF THE greatest aspects of *Half-Life 2* is just how real everything feels. Characters appear to be going about their daily lives, helping to further paint the grim world that Valve has created, while conveniently filling you in with important information. You'll often discover neat little scenarios like friends holding each other or treating the wounded that you'd otherwise miss, as it's all subtly taking place in the background. It's amazingly effective, and adds a further layer of believability to the world.

THE BRIDGE
■ ONE OF *HALF-LIFE 2*'S tensest moments comes when you need to cross a derelict bridge. The sense of vertigo as you scramble along the loose struts is immense, and you'll need a good eye in order to find the best way across the maze of metal. Halfway across you get attacked, putting you in a frantic gunfight with nowhere to hide and an immense drop beneath you. Things get even harder once you've reached your destination, as you have to make your way back with a Combine Gunship hot on your tail.

THE GRAVITY GUN
■ QUITE POSSIBLY ONE of the finest weapons in videogaming, it's rather telling that the only thing that's impressed us since is Valve's own Portal Gun. You pick this up early in your adventure, and it changes your approach to the rest of the game dramatically. Levels suddenly become puzzles, as the gun lets you manipulate objects and work out inventive ways of clearing obstacles. It's even better during the final stage as, infused with Dark Energy, you pick up enemy soldiers and throw them about like rag dolls.

HELPING THE REBELS
■ AS YOU'RE TRAVELLING along Highway 17 you encounter a small pocket of resistance fighters expecting incoming forces. Upon gaining access to a rocket launcher you're attacked by gunships and bedlam erupts. It's the first real showcase of not only the enemy AI, but your rebel compatriots. As you do your best to take down the gunship, your AI helpers will point out when your weapon needs reloading and even hand over ammo. It's an excellent sequence that adds further realism to the game world.

HIGHER GROUND
■ AS YOU APPROACH Highway 17's beach you encounter deadly Antlions that are kept at bay by machines that send vibrations through the earth. The safety of those machines is soon left behind though, and you're forced to negotiate treacherous terrain where dropping to the floor immediately causes the Antlions to attack. The tension soon racks up as you make your way across rocks and broken debris, using your gravity gun to clear large stretches of ground. It's easily one of the tensest moments in the game.

TURNING THE TABLES
■ AS *HALF-LIFE 2*'S ending draws near, you're required to assault a heavily armed prison. Enemies are everywhere, and the whole level seems to be a suicide mission. It's fortunate, then, that you've access to a new weapon that allows you to control the Antlions. After being punished by the insectoid foes in the previous levels it's gratifying to set them loose against your enemies. Similar squad tactics are used later on with rebels, but they don't feel quite as effective as they do in your first encounter.

STRIDER ATTACK
■ STRIDERS ARE HUGE tripod robots that require immense firepower to take down. Without a rocket launcher you're usually outmatched, so you'll often have to hide from them. While there are several battles where you get to take them down, by far the best moment to feature the metallic monstrosities is when you find yourself in an underground tunnel having giving one the slip. As you make your way forwards you hear a crashing from behind, only to realise that the beast has broken through the ceiling.

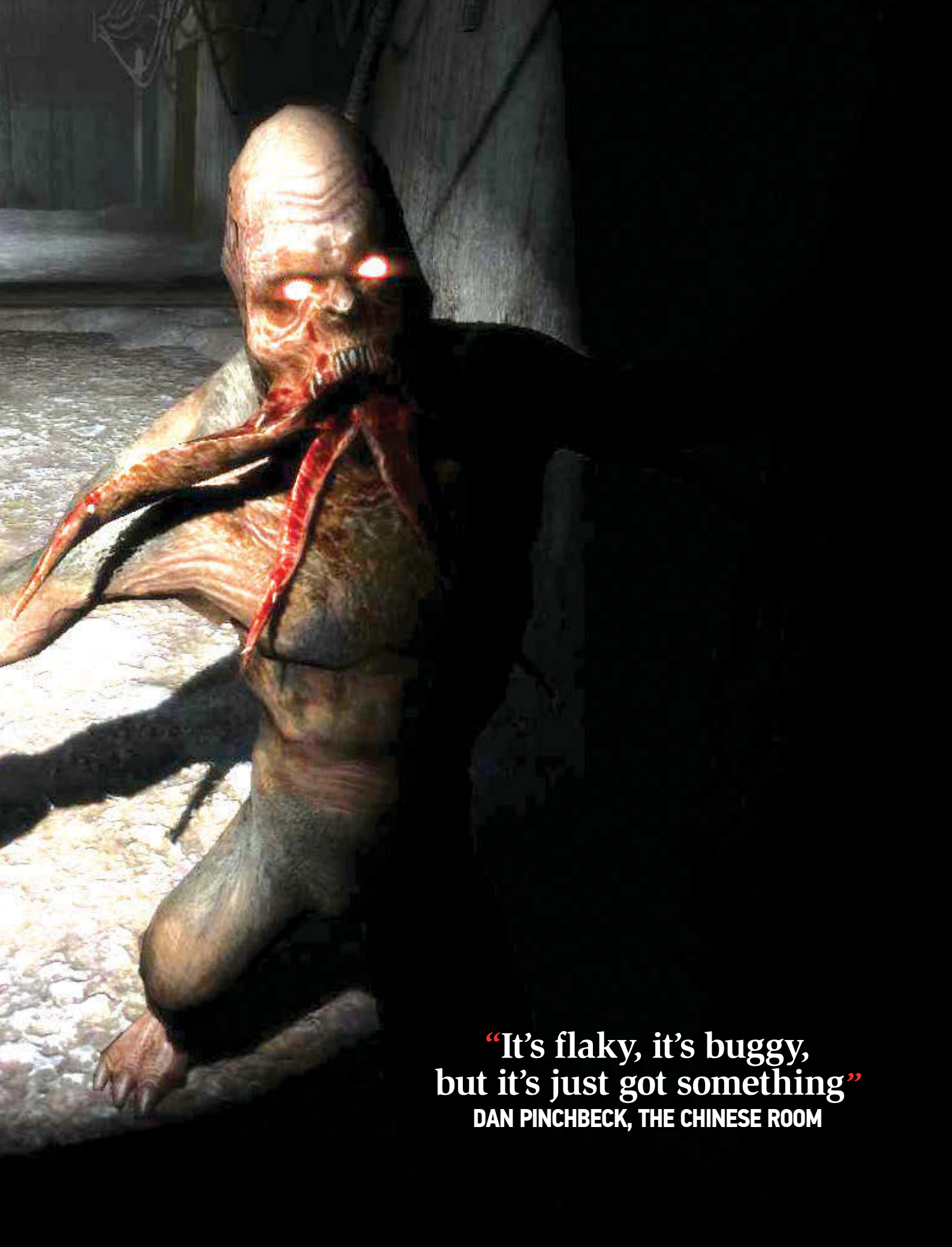## STALKER: Shadow of Chernobyl

DAN PINCHBECK- THE CHINESE ROOM

66 *It's a classic game that has so much wrong with it − it's buggy, it's flaky… but it's just got something. It's got a really hard to define soul to it that makes it an incredible world to be in. It's one of the only games that I can go back to again and again. There's just so much game there and if you look back at how much was cut before release, it was insanely ambitious. You wouldn't have known that the studio had made games before, given how they approached it. It's like someone said 'This is how you make games' and they did everything else. Because of that it's a brilliant game.* **99**

INSIDE GUERRILLA GAMES

Much like the old maxim that you should never judge a book by its cover, the same can easily be applied to the outward appearance of any videogame developer. Valve's Seattle-based headquarters is wedged several floors above ground in the type of beige nondescript office tower that should have its walls adorned in cat-based motivational posters, not concepts for best-selling science-fiction games; likewise, 4A Games' technical excellence is somewhat belied by its location in the heart of Kiev in a low-key outfit adjacent to a car garage and surrounded by stray animals.

On the other end of the scale is Guerrilla Games. Located among the narrow canals of Amsterdam and in one of the classier areas of the city, its chalk-white walls proudly display its company's logo, through its sliding doors is a reception area dressed up in replica explosive barrels, camouflage netting and overseen by a Helghast soldier. And the charade continues through its corridors and

You might want to focus on it for another week but that's probably not a good idea.'"

"At one point we had the highest resolution ashtray ever made," adds Bak as an example from the studio's most recent release, *Killzone: Shadow Fall*. "It had the latest lighting model and texture resolutions were through the roof. It took up a sizeable portion of the memory alone. It's just a tiny thing… but that's how passionate people get working here." Primarily known as the *Killzone* studio (Guerrilla made multiplatform title *Shellshock: Nam '67* before moving onto *Killzone* and signing and being acquired by Sony), it has worked on every home console entry in the franchise since it arrived on PS2 in 2002. Its most recent challenge was its most daunting: delivering the PlayStation 4's biggest launch title, back in late 2013.

"It was the right choice to do it," exclaims ter Heide with a hint of regret. "If we had to go back and had to say 'Would you do a launch title again?' Yes, I would make that decision again. It was good for us as a team in terms of getting used to new hardware, to focus the entire company

> "**If we had to go back and had to say 'Would you do a launch title again?' Yes, I would make that decision again**"
> **Steven ter Heide, game director**

into its main social area, before taking a more customary approach to interior office design upstairs – but even here trophies and awards are proudly displayed in a cabinet for visitors to glance at as they enter. But, weirdly, modesty is what rises to the surface during our time at the studio.

"Everyone shares that drive to go after the next big thing and that's probably the overriding attitude when stepping through these doors," says Guerrilla's Steven ter Heide, game director on *Killzone: Shadow Fall*, who, alongside lead designer Arjan Bak, is spending his time today guiding us around the studio's digs. "It's a very ambitious and passionate studio. You need to be. You're living with these games for years and you really need to like games to make them."

That enthusiasm has earned Guerrilla a sterling reputation among critics and consumers alike, matching technical excellence and immersive gameplay consistently with some of the best visuals on the market. It's this obsessive attention to detail that, as ter Heide says, keeps the studio ticking over on a daily basis. "Everyone will be passionate talking about the one little thing that they're working on," he beams. "'This is the best lamppost ever!' one person will say. You have to rein in a little bit. 'That lamppost is not the most important thing in the game.

on doing something new. It felt very liberating and inspiring. You run into new boundaries but I think that's very exciting because creatively you can do a lot of things. *But* at the same time you know that deadline is there; you're committed to launch and that is always something that's in the back of your head, and all the changes you make are in light of that."

Ter Heide muses on changes that could've been made to the game, talking about the sizeable task the studio had and how on a gameplay level the studio's focus became blurred as development continued. Praising his team's work on the expansive opening level, he expresses slight disappointment that the studio didn't do better in following missions that regressed into more linear gameplay tropes.

"Could we have made different choices? Would it have resulted in a different type of game? Absolutely. But would it have been a better or worse

■ Providing the PlayStation 4 with its killer app on launch was one of the hardest challenges the studio has ever had to face.

game? I don't know. We try at the time to make the best choices we can. Looking back at the game, certainly there are things we could've done better. We may have been too ambitious – it's the biggest game we've built ever in terms of content. Way more variety in terms of environments, it's a huge campaign and it's a little bit too much perhaps. We could've been more diligent in picking the things we wanted. But you just roll with it. You're on a train that you can't stop."

■ Game director Steven ter Heide describes much of the team as quite blunt. "People will just say 'That's shit.' We're open and honest about what we think it should be and never afraid to learn or ask questions."

However, *Shadow Fall* **was far from a negative experience.** As one of the first of Sony's worldwide teams to get hands-on with the hardware, discovering and utilising the potential of the PlayStation 4 was a hugely gratifying experience. "One thing the PS4 helped with – and we've been there for every generation from PS2 – is that it was easy to adapt," reveals Bak. "There was very little time to get into it and get our game running, but there were more straightforward toolsets to work with. The PS3 was more abstract in terms of getting the most of it, and we got good at it by the time we got to *Killzone 3*, but with PS4 it has all that power there and you can start using it quickly."

Held in equally high esteem with studios such as Epic and Crytek when it comes to bleeding-edge visuals, one of the biggest challenges for being one of the first titles out on a new generation of hardware was defining exactly what the rest of the generation would deliver to gamers. Ter Heide muses on both what the studio achieved with *Shadow Fall* and where computer graphics are heading in the next few years. "I think graphics and tech aren't worth as much as having to make gameplay to accompany it," he says. "We have ambitions and we look at PS4 – going from 3 to 4 – what's going to define this generation in terms of tech features and look. It's difficult to nail down a single feature. It's trying to come up with a consistent living world that you feel is alive. That's something we circled with *Shadow Fall*. We'd have trees and leaves that moved realistically but as soon as one thing didn't have the physical properties you expect from the real world, the whole image would collapse. Everything needs to be at a certain level – whether it's the wind passing through or accurate reflections – and that's the

■ The latest batch of DLC for *Killzone: Shadow Fall* is the co-op expansion *Intercept*.

trickiest thing to get right. That takes more than good tech; that takes clever art and game direction to come together into a coherent image. For a lot of people in the studio who have been living in the franchise for ten to fifteen years, now is very exciting time," enthuses ter Heide. "It's hard also because this is an entirely different challenge of starting something new and fresh." Hitting an abrupt impasse on our tour, we're confronted by a series of doors blacked out by large curtains obstructing the view into the main work areas of the team. "There's a new IP in development here, which is why all these things are dark," confirms ter Heide. " There are other things happening in the studio that are being worked on alongside *Killzone*."

Guerrilla **won't divulge any new details about its unannounced new project, other than it's completely different to** *Killzone* **and will arrive on PlayStation 4.** Having worked on the *Killzone* franchise for over a decade, the new IP represents a fresh creative opportunity for the studio. "We've spent a lot of time with one franchise and we know it inside out and know what the fan's expectations are," says ter Heide. "But at the same time every game has a different challenge to it. With *Killzone 2* we set ourselves a ridiculous benchmark with a certain trailer and trying to live up to that; with *Killzone 3* we integrated Move, we integrated 3D, we had a very short dev cycle; in *Shadow Fall* it was a launch title, so that was new for us. Every project is different with creative challenges – it helped the team to break new ground and go beyond their boundaries."

So with each project representing a new challenge for the studio as it continues to expand both creatively and as

GUERRILLA ON PROJECT MORPHEUS

WITH PROJECT MORPHEUS ATTRACTING A LOT OF INDUSTRY BUZZ, THERE'S MUCH SPECULATION ABOUT WHICH OF SONY'S INTERNAL STUDIOS WILL BE INTEGRATING THE NEW DEVICE INTO THEIR NEXT PROJECTS. AFTER SUCCESSFULLY MAKING MOVE AND 3D A PART OF *KILLZONE 3*, HAS GUERRILLA GAMES THOUGHT ABOUT INTEGRATING MORPHEUS? "I THINK MORPHEUS IS A REALLY EXCITING PROPOSITION," SAYS GAME DIRECTOR STEVE TER HEIDE. "IT'S A DIFFERENT WAY OF EXPERIENCING GAMES. THERE ARE A LOT OF EXPERIENCES THERE AND A LOT OF GAMES THAT BRING TO LIFE ITS VALUE BUT I'M NOT SURE AN FPS IS RIGHT FOR IT JUST YET. I'M NOT SURE IF THE CONTROL METHODS PERHAPS NEED A LITTLE MORE WORK? I DON'T KNOW YET; I'VE NOT HAD ENOUGH TIME TO SIT WITH IT AND FIGURE IT OUT. BUT I THINK IT HOLDS GREAT PROMISE. WE HAVEN'T HAD ENOUGH TIME WITH IT TO KNOW WHETHER WE CAN MAKE IT WORK FOR THE TYPES OF GAMES WE WANT TO MAKE."

a prominent European developer, what challenge does the new IP represent? "I would say the big challenge is doing two projects," says Bak. Ter Heide agrees: "Becoming a multi-project studio is a challenge in itself. We're finding that it's not two projects you're running, because if you have post-launch as well it'll become three projects. You have to be sensitive to the needs of other projects and it's a different ball game altogether."

Bak and ter Heide talk about post-launch support and investment in the community to continue to develop and evolve a game months after its release. *Shadow Fall* most recently launched its *Intercept* DLC – a co-op multiplayer add-on that shakes up the fundamental gameplay. "We see it that the game is the players. It's not ours," says ter Heide. "We've told an interesting story and made the game we

that play them. As Guerrilla moves into uncharted territory by breaking away from the beloved IP it has cultivated over the past decade, there's a focus here on learning and openness that creates a unique mindset among its peers.

"We're very ambitious and driven – you need to be if you want to be in the industry," states ter Heide, matter-of-factly. " But for us it's more towards ourselves than the outside. Ever since *Killzone,* people have been saying that we're the *Halo*-killers. We're not the *Halo*-killer, we're just making a shooter that happens to launch around the same window as *Halo. Killzone 2* was compared to all of these military shooters like *Call Of Duty*. We've not sought that out; we've made the games we wanted to make and do the best we can. It's awesome because

> "WE KNOW THAT WE CAN DO BETTER AND WE NEED TO DO BETTER AND THAT'S WHAT DRIVES US"
> STEVEN TER HEIDE, GAME DIRECTOR

wanted to make, put a whole bunch of features in there but players will gravitate to areas that they like. We're there to then support it. If we look at how people are playing multiplayer right now – for example, we didn't set up the game to be about Team Deathmatch, we really wanted it to be more tactical and objective-based. Yet, Team Deathmatch is the most popular mode being played online right now in *Killzone*. Who are we to say that's wrong? People are having fun and they're entitled to that, so how can we make that a better experience? There are limits to what you can do and how much you can change the game but within reason we'll try to adapt and adjust. It's their game now and we'll see how far we can support that."

It's an encouraging thought and one driven both by the studio's passion for its own games but also for the people

we feel we're still a young studio with a lot to learn still – yet we're being compared to *Call Of Duty* with these humongous studios behind them that have track records that go way, way back. We're not there yet; we're not even in the same league."

"We've just moved to a studio with power and facilities," laughs Bak, pointing out our impressively lavish surroundings. "You should've seen our old building." Even if the studio looks the part, for everyone inside Guerrilla there's still plenty left to prove. "That's what's exciting is that we can see there's so much more ladder to climb," concludes ter Heide. "We know that we can do better and we need to do better and that's what drives us. That's the internal drive of knowing we can absolutely get there."
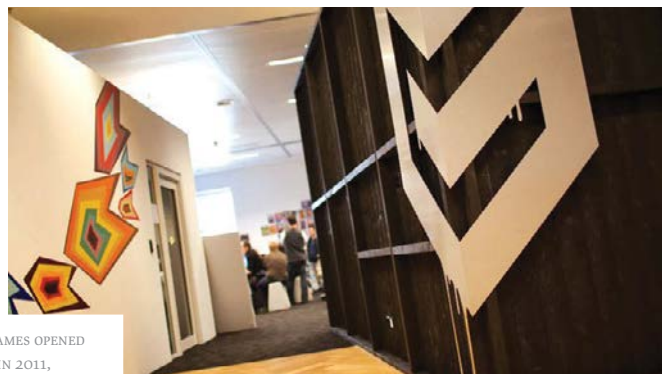
■ GUERRILLA GAMES OPENED ITS NEW OFFICES IN 2011, JUST AFTER THE RELEASE OF *KILLZONE 3*. ACCORDING TO THE TEAM, THE FACT IT HAD WATER AND HEATING WAS A BIG STEP UP FROM ITS PREVIOUS RESIDENCE

TROUBLE
IN
PARADISE

Irrational Games returns to the world of BioShock with a brand new instalment in the franchise, dropping the undersea world of Rapture in favour of a city in the clouds

"Even God deserves a do-over. What is Columbia but an arc for another time"
Father Comstock

IT'S BEEN A long time coming. As *BioShock!* leaves the depths of Rapture for the very first time, Irrational Games is ready to unleash its mystery in the clouds. A world brimming with racism and violently executed religious ideals – welcome to Columbia, a New Eden for the 'worthy'. games™ went hands on with the first few hours of *BioShock Infinite*; has it been worth the wait?

There's an inescapable sense of déjà vu surrounding the opening moments of *BioShock Infinite*. A lighthouse on the horizon, an untamed storm swallowing the sky and the rage of the Atlantic Ocean under your feet, but a return to Rapture this is not. Where one journey began with descent towards a dystopian hell in a bathysphere, *Infinite* is more concerned with ascension.

Infinite is the third instalment in the *BioShock* franchise in six years, but only the second to bear the Irrational Games stamp. It is a small but integral detail. As any players who crawled through 2K Marin's wayward 2010 effort can confirm, the magic was missing the second time around. Whether it was the absence of Ken Levine's guiding vision, or the nuances of Rapture simply faded away with time remains to be seen. *Infinite* doesn't want you to forget its heritage, in fact it often hinges on it, but when Levine and his team at Irrational were presented with the opportunity to return for a straight-up *BioShock* sequel, they declined.

"When we started [development after *BioShock*], we actually worked on a different IP for several months," states creative director Levine, on the aptly named 'Project Icarus' as *Infinite* was known internally. "But it wasn't really right for us. We were stuck. We didn't have any ideas for another *BioShock* game. Going back to Rapture? We felt our studio had said everything we needed to say about that. So then we said, what could we do another BioShock game about, what could that be? First thing we worked out was how it can be different, rather

> ## "Going back to Rapture? We felt our studio had said everything we needed to say about that. So then we said, what could we do another BioShock game about, what could that be?"
>
> **Ken Levine, Irrational Games**

than how can it be the same. Walking away from Rapture, all those characters and that aesthetic, that was tough," says Levine, adding, "[But] as much as I love it, Rapture really is a dungeon. It's a bunch of corridors. The water doesn't really exist outside of a piece of art outside of the windows. It's a trick, a beautiful trick."

Beautiful just about covers it; Rapture was an award-winning world. It was a place Irrational could show rather than tell, teeming with life and rich with detail. A world built on the pillars of objectivism and crushed under the weight of greed, addiction and power. We arrived when the city was rusting and buckling under the weight of the Atlantic Ocean.

In March, Irrational is ushering in a new utopia. Trading sea for sky, *Infinite* quickly introduces players to Columbia in 1912, a floating monument to American exceptionalism, a herald of America's ascension on the global stage; it's a beautiful sight to behold. A city above the clouds, suspended by blimps and balloons, it's entirely removed from Andrew Ryan's warped, and ultimately doomed, libertarianism experiment. Columbia is in its prime, disconnected from the world below, a literal kingdom of heaven for those willing to pledge discipleship to Father Comstock.

One who might not be so quick to pledge to the cause is Booker DeWitt, a private eye and disgraced ex-Pinkerton agent desperate to take the easy way out of his mounting problems. "He's a guy who has some gambling debt, and he's obviously made some mistakes in his life and he's in a bad place," states

Booker finds Elizabeth in the city's Siphon monument – she is the 'specimen' that should not be approached.

Once freed from captivity by Booker, Elizabeth will aid him throughout the game with her special abilities and suggestions.

Levine, giving us an insight into the head we will be occupying over the course of the lengthy campaign. "There's a saying in writing: you always want to put the character in the last place on Earth that they want to be, and that's what this game does."

As Booker takes his first steps onto Columbia's boardwalk, the sense of wonder is breathtaking. You'd be hard pressed to see any reason as to why Columbia stands as his worst nightmare. The streets are alive with movement and conversation. Kids play under the shower of a burst fire hydrant, people are marvelling at the procession moving through the streets and every character around you is involved in a very real day-to-day activity.

O f course, the devil is in the detail and trouble never seems to be far off from paradise. Pay closer attention to the signs adorning the city streets and posters on the walls: they are ultra-nationalistic propaganda asserting Father Comstock's religious regime. The residents of Columbia are all suspiciously white, and audio diaries lead us to the discovery that Columbia was built as a respite from the 'unwanted'.

Religion, race and prejudice are the central themes and the underlying current to Columbia. Booker is quickly drawn into the very public lynching of a mixed-race couple, and later, run-ins with Ku Klux Klan charter members and suicide bombings – all in aid of Comstock's desire to rid the city of Booker – would dominate the encounters found in the latter half of our playthrough.
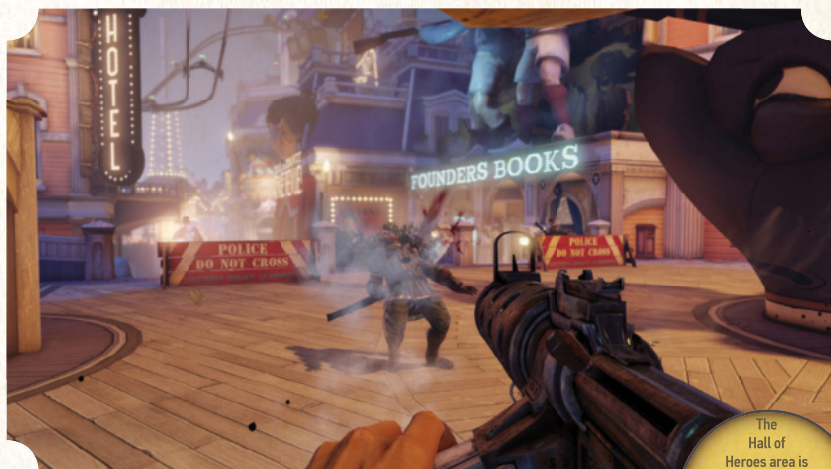
The Hall of Heroes area is home to various historical soldiers such as Chinese warriors from the Boxer Rebellion.

These subjects can be difficult to address, and videogames in particular tend to skirt around the big issues of life. This is a reality that Levine has approached not just from the few who have played *BioShock Infinite*, but from developers in his own studio as well.

"I'm an intense history buff, a culture buff, but I had to do a lot of thinking about religion. Getting to understand Comstock was tougher for me than anything with Andrew Ryan. I had to understand him to write him. I had to understand his motivation

Dropping in on an armoured warrior, Booker takes the opportunity to get up close and personal for some melee combat.

and his world view because I never had an ecstatic religious experience," considers Levine, understanding how delicate the subjects of religion and race are. "That's a transformative event for many people. It's not like they just let go and think about it, it just happens. That never happened to me.

"Something really helped make [Comstock] click for me. We actually had someone on the team who got to a part in the game, and they are very religious, got to this part in the game, put his controller down, opened up Microsoft Word and wrote a resignation letter. He was extremely offended by it," began Levine. "We had a conversation; we talked about what bothered him. It occurred to me that I hadn't really done a good enough job of explaining why anybody would follow Comstock in the first place. The racism is immediately a complicated matter, but people follow him. Very normal people follow some very dark individuals sometimes, but there's a reason for it. I really struggled figuring out the reason, [but] during that conversation the outlines of it really started to form for me," says Levine, adding, "It's not about making Comstock palatable or likeable, it's about making him understandable.

I said [to the offended team member], 'Look, I'm going to go do some writing. I'm going to show you what I did. I'm not going to ask for your approval, because honestly if you said "no I hate it", then that's too bad. I'm just gonna do what I do. But I think you're going to find this interesting, and I think I'm going to find it makes a better game.' "

The team member in question ended up staying, but Levine has had similar conversations with other members of his staff. Sex, drugs, and until recently rock 'n' roll, have been barely touched subjects in gaming, let alone religion and race. The slightest whiff of controversy tends to lead angry fanboys and soapbox media to the doorstep of developers hungry to expand the horizons of storytelling potential. For Levine, the time is now; he can't see any reason why he should back down from telling his story, no matter the potential implications. "I don't think anyone would sit down with writer X or film director Y and say 'oh is it okay to take on this theme?' We are our own worst enemy. The fact that it should be a question... why wouldn't we? Why shouldn't we? Games are still perceived by some as toys; it would be hard to have Adolf Hitler with a kung fu grip, you know that would be a little weird, right, because toys aren't that expressive. Well, games are incredibly expressive. Games are as fully featured, if not more fully featured, when it comes to expressive ideas than any other form of media," states Levine.

"I don't think anyone would sit down with writer X or film director Y and say 'oh is it okay to take on this theme?' "

Ken Levine, Irrational Games

BioShock Infinite is channelling a new lease on expressive gameplay. Where Jack – your hands in *BioShock 1* – was a mute, Booker is fully voiced. This is an integral factor in nailing the situation and motives of the character, not that Levine quite considered just how much work it would entail.

"In the beginning Booker and Elizabeth were mute, no joke, because we were so fucking terrified of what it meant. Let me tell you, my writing hand is very, very, very tired," Levine chuckled. "The boardwalk level I worked an early pass on was several times longer than the entire *BioShock 1* script. *Several times longer.*" The mission in question only made up a small segment of our playthrough, but it was full of life and character – it quickly creates a sense of realism and validity to the setting. Columbia is full of hubs like this; a beach and adjacent promenade also convey similar emotions of sustainability to the world. If you want you can run straight through and get to the next bout of brutality, or you can stay and enjoy a slice of life. Every NPC has something to do and say, a place in the world. It's exhaustingly realised, it's a level of detail that we just haven't experienced in a videogame before.

How Booker found himself in this world is central to the narrative, and a point is hammered home early on: "find the girl, and wipe away the debt." The girl in question is Elizabeth, the mysterious prize Booker has been sent to reclaim. While the punishment for failing to complete this task wasn't made perfectly clear, a butchered lighthouse caretaker leads us to believe that whatever crowd Booker has fallen in with aren't big on second chances.

The game is reliant on you quickly forming a relationship with Elizabeth, a Rapunzel-like character under lock and key in the heart of the city. The banter between the characters helps establish this quickly and after a daring rescue, we get to witness her very first experiences outside of the confinement of four walls and tears in the fabric of reality. She loves the beautiful world of Columbia. She stops to smell every flower and enjoy every sight and sound, though she's genuinely taken aback by the darker side she soon discovers. She's confused by a 'Whites

MOSQUITO TURRET:

■ The fight gets really hectic and when the hulking mechanic enemies come into play, it can get pretty tough pretty quickly. Luckily Elizabeth can open up a tear in reality here and bring a floating MG turret into the world. It does a great job of churning out enemies across the verticality of the level.

BANK EXTERIOR MAP

Irrational was kind enough to let games™ have a taste of a later level from *Infinite*. The Bank Exterior fight is tough, swarming with enemies and unrelenting in its pursuit to put you 40,000ft under. We also had access to a full range of Vigors and weapons, though we didn't quite know how to utilise them… nothing wrong with sticking to old favourites: fire and murderous crows that love to eat flesh.

BANK FRONT:

■ Much needed health packs are placed around the front doors of the bank, which you'll need because the fight quickly gets insanely tough. If the mechanical vice hands of death from the Handyman weren't enough, enemies and barges continue to swarm in through the level. Worst case scenario, you can always just hide here behind some cover while Elizabeth scouts the area to find supplies.

BOOKER DECOY

HEALTHPACK

WATER PUDDLE

HEALTHPACK

MOSQUITO TURRET

OIL SLICK

SALTS

KEY

- WEAPONS TEAR
- OFFENSIVE TEAR
- DEFENSIVE TEAR

- L 4
- L 3
- L 2
- L 1

BALCONY:

■ When you're taking a fight to Sky-Lines and zipping around the area as quickly as possible, you might not think to climb the Sky-Lines higher to access this balcony, but the rewards are plentiful if you do. A few enemies can be brutalised, revealing lots of weapons, though the RPG does wonders.

SKY-LINES:

■ The Sky-Line combat is surprisingly fluid: you can quickly use them to get vantage points around the map or to get a few seconds away from the hordes of religious extremists. Though once the Handyman shows up, he has a tendency to electrocute the lines, stopping you in your tracks.

OIL SLICK:

■ When the enemies really start closing in on your position, Elizabeth can open a time tear here, creating the possibility for fiery death on all who oppose your right to breathe. Opening this tear does of course close the others, so you need to weigh the risk of closing down the floating turret or ammo reserves in favour of pyrotechnics.

START:

■ You start here on a platform overlooking the exterior of the bank. Barges come in from the left with automated turrets on board while enemies swarm in from the bank's front doors. If you're quick you can possess the turrets on the barge and turn them on the enemies before they bring the big guns into play.

Only' bathroom the duo stumble upon in a Zeppelin station, and she's horrified by the notion of violence. It's quite the accomplishment for the Irrational team, who were admittedly worried it wouldn't work.

We knew she would be the heart of the game – she's carrying a lot on her little virtual shoulders," says Levine hesitantly, eager to assure players that they never want the game to feel like an escort mission. "A lot of the time in the public, people would say, 'she should have a gun'. [My response is] if she's going to kill three enemies in a battle, why not just have three fewer enemies in the battle? If you just need something for them to do, think of something else because the player is perfectly capable of doing the shooting. That's why we started working on all of these activities for her to do. Not only because they were cool but because they reflected her personality. They help tell her story. She's this little nerdy girl who's been trapped in a tower. She developed all these interests and all those interests get reflected in the things she does for you."

Lock picking, code reading and item scrounging are just a handful of the things Elizabeth will do for you throughout your time in Columbia. Vitally, if you're running low on Salts or ammunition in the middle of a fight, she will scour the surrounding area for any items that might be of use. It's a helpful feature and one that keeps the game constantly moving, a godsend considering that the pace of combat has been greatly quickened.

The aforementioned tears in time and reality, unsurprisingly, play a huge role in many of the mysteries found through *Infinite*. She has the ability to manipulate the fabric of reality around her, opening up tears that she can use to bring objects, items and gateways to new worlds out of existence.

The play we had with *Infinite* has our head spinning with potential story avenues, but it seems likely that time, or the manipulation of it, will be the crux of Columbia's secrets. We briefly see Elizabeth tear a hole 60 years into the future to the French premiere of 'The Revenge of the Jedi'. Elsewhere a barbershop quartet harmonise a rendition of the Beach Boys' 1966 song 'God Only Knows' and later, on a beach, a period rendition of Cyndi Lauper's 1979 track 'Girls Just Want To Have Fun' can be heard. These certainly aren't by mistake, but by design, and the game will certainly only offer more of these tantalising mysteries as we progress through Columbia.

Who is Zachary Comstock? Why are we really on Columbia, and what is that strange 'AD' branding on Booker's hand identifying him as the False Prophet? Things aren't what they seem, but Levine certainly isn't going to tell us anything, offering simply, "Obviously there is a connection there, part

Columbia is full of patriotic flags and banners, but scratch beneath the veneer and you'll find a more disturbing nationalism.
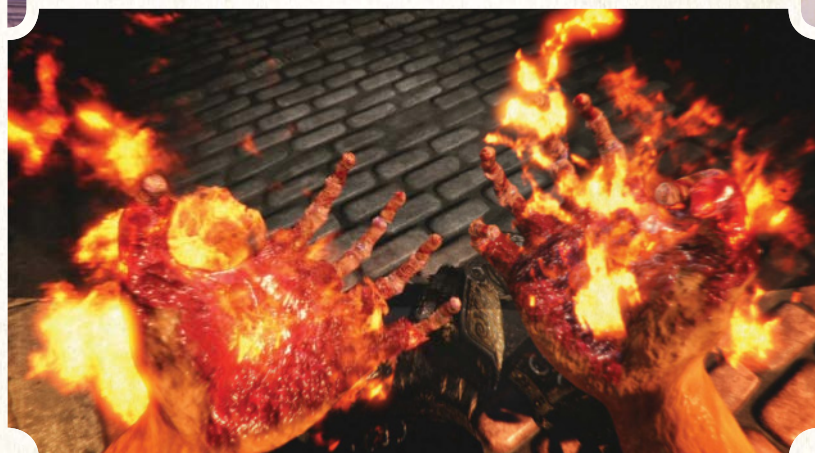
The Hall of Heroes history museum is the setting for some hectic combat – here Booker uses the explosive 'Devil's Kiss' Vigor.

of the interest in the story is seeing where that goes." So many questions, no time for answers.

★

Of course, the trouble-in-paradise motif also extends out of Columbia and into development itself. Irrational has been struck by multiple delays, high-profile personnel changes late into development, rumours of cut multiplayer modes and, thanks to an E3 demo, fan expectation raised to near unobtainable levels. Thankfully, Levine is aware of the hype. It's because of this hype that *BioShock Infinite* went quiet for almost a year, skipping last year's E3 entirely to focus on polishing the final product. Though Levine is quick to assure us that all is right in the world at Irrational.

"Of the guys who worked on *BioShock Infinite* and *BioShock 1*, we only lost one person," says Levine, explaining the departure of art director Nate Wells to Naughty Dog in August of last year. "We went through a similar process on *BioShock 1*; he was originally the art director on *BioShock 1* and then Scott [Sinclair] became art director because various things happened. The same happened here.

"Nate said he had to go do this thing, and I said 'Go, God bless'. And I turned to Scott and I said, 'Guess what kid!' " Levine smiles, adding, "I never begrudge people leaving. It's not a prison camp. Only thing that matters is making a game that people like and are excited about. At the end of the day, words mean nothing, the game means everything.

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>
> **Ken Levine, Irrational Games**

"I try to not set expectations for myself... There is this cycle of concern that will build up. For example when we first showed the game there was a lot of concern that 'Oh my God, it's not really a *BioShock* game, they just threw the name on there 'cause marketing forced them to. Then it's, 'Oh my God, that E3 demo is a hack and they will never be able to replicate that.' Then it's like, 'The game's in trouble and everyone's leaving', and then," he finally sighs, "it's like, 'The cover's bad!' – he lets out with a smile. Levine is aware that people will always worry about something they are passionate about; he's been in the game long enough to not let it get to him. He's focused on the end product, because really that's all that matters.

"People are passionate about *BioShock* and it's not about *BioShock* 2011 or *BioShock* 2012, they're passionate about something that feels very fresh but very different at the same time," comments Levine. "Really, you get to the point where you realise there is always something people will worry about. They're worried because they care, I've worked on enough games where nobody cared, that I'll take the worry. I know that tomorrow, I know that no matter what I show, it will cause people to worry because they care. It's all part of the job."

Fans are rightfully concerned that *Infinite* is *BioShock* in name and not heart, but getting hands-on you quickly realise that the series isn't defined by its place but its feel. It has a set of rules that can be applied anywhere else, and this time around Irrational has built an expansive, breathing world that we simply can't wait to explore further come March.

SURVIVAL OF

Crytek takes another step into the future as it continues to evolve the first-person shooter in Crysis 3. Taking a trip to the studio's Frankfurt headquarters, games™ falls prey to a hunter reborn

t was inevitable that Crytek would eventually stumble over its own reputation. From the moment the German developer shot out of the gate in 2004 with tropical first-person shooter *Far Cry*, it set the knees trembling of every PC purist who marvelled at the retina-blasting visuals on display. That's largely due to the proprietary CryEngine, which in turn enabled *Far Cry*, *Crysis* and *Crysis 2* to churn out lifelike yet fantastical vistas that had the propensity to topple modest PC setups.

But as the console generation continues to lumber onwards, the studio has found itself either holding its own against fellow top-tier developers or outmatched and outgunned in every way – because, frankly, unless you're DICE, no one really gives a damn about how immaculate your pixel-sniffing engine is. Still, in *Crysis* the studio has found itself a franchise that has more than enough potential to offer something other than an empty vessel to embellish with pretty scenery, taking the first-person shooter to outlandish extremes in a genre where po-faced machismo and flag-waving jingoism reign supreme.

Sure, last year's *Crysis 2* got a lot wrong, but it couldn't be accused of not making the most of its setting. Doing justice to its location, it represented New York City as the shimmering epicentre of an intergalactic invasion, walking players through the tourist guide of the city's highlights before decimating the iconography of the Big Apple with gleeful aplomb. As a facsimile it could hardly be faulted, but it was – pardon the pun – a far cry from the franchise's roots, with players shackled to a street-based grid structure that considerably constricted the ability to skulk in the shadows, power-slam enemies and optimise the power of the franchise's USP – the Nanosuit.

But it's easy to forget that, on paper, the sequel was something of a risky proposition. *Crysis 2* was Crytek's inaugural console release, engulfed in envious hyperbole and representing the first union between the central Frankfurt office and a little band of Nottingham merry men, formerly known as Free Radical Design. With the franchise returning two years after the last entry, Crytek is eager to demonstrate exactly what a super-suited soldier from the future can do with a bag of magic tricks.

>> "I think being involved in the *Crysis* universe does allow us to do things that other games can't," states lead multiplayer designer Adam Duckett rather matter-of-factly. "We do have the Nanosuit, we do have the cloaking ability, and

THE FITTEST

we do have the super-strength and super-speed. That allows us to create a different experience. We've looked at the paving of the game and we want it to make you feel like you're powerful. That you are a badass, basically!"

Duckett is part of the Crytek UK team responsible for the multiplayer component of the game. When Free Radical was acquired by Crytek in 2009, the studio was put to work on the *Crysis* franchise immediately, bringing its illustrious design sensibilities, honed on the much-loved *TimeSplitters*, to a multiplayer mode that represented an alternative to the increasingly prevalent *Call Of Duty* template. However, Duckett and his team faced challenges walking into unfamiliar territory and working with the main European studio.

"When we came into *Crysis 2*, we were formerly Free Radical Design, and

it was our first project with the CryEngine and working with Frankfurt and also working on the *Crysis* franchise," says Duckett of the early embedding period. "And so you have three huge things that you have to learn quite fast. A hundred new people, very talented new people, and it was a case of getting up to speed and producing a multiplayer component. And now we feel fully integrated into the Crytek family, we're working a lot closer, we're able to collaborate on ideas for the single-player and the multiplayer and bounce ideas forward, so what *Crysis 3* is becoming is more

of a complete package. So you'll have *Crysis 3* multiplayer that will actually feel like an integral part of the game, and you'll see concepts mirrored across the single and multiplayer."

With the two studios having established a comfortable rapport working on *Crysis 2*'s production, the third part of the series therefore has proven a far more collaborative enterprise. The first task for the German and Nottingham offices was nailing a tone that would befit the superpowered brute hiding under the snug Nanosuit. If you've caught a whiff of *Crysis 3*'s early

marketing push to date, you'll be more than aware that the whole shebang has gone a tad John Rambo on the sci-fi saga – a parallel most evident in the snazzy new composite bow that protagonist Prophet is wielding.

"The bow came about really because we were searching around for different themes," says producer Mike Read. "We knew early on that the hunter theme was going to be in there, but it was a question of what is the ultimate hunter weapon. When we thought about it and talked about actually being a hunter, we liked this hybrid between *Predator* and *Rambo*."

'Predator' is a word that crops up in conversation more than once during our time at the Frankfurt offices. More often than not, it's a casual buzzword that passes the developers' lips to emphasise the renewed focus on playing the hunter,

> **"BEING INVOLVED IN THE CRYSIS UNIVERSE DOES ALLOW US TO DO THINGS THAT OTHER GAMES CAN'T"**
> ADAM DUCKETT, CRYTEK UK

● Crash Site returns from *Crysis 2*, with players scrambling to protect a downed alien escape pod.
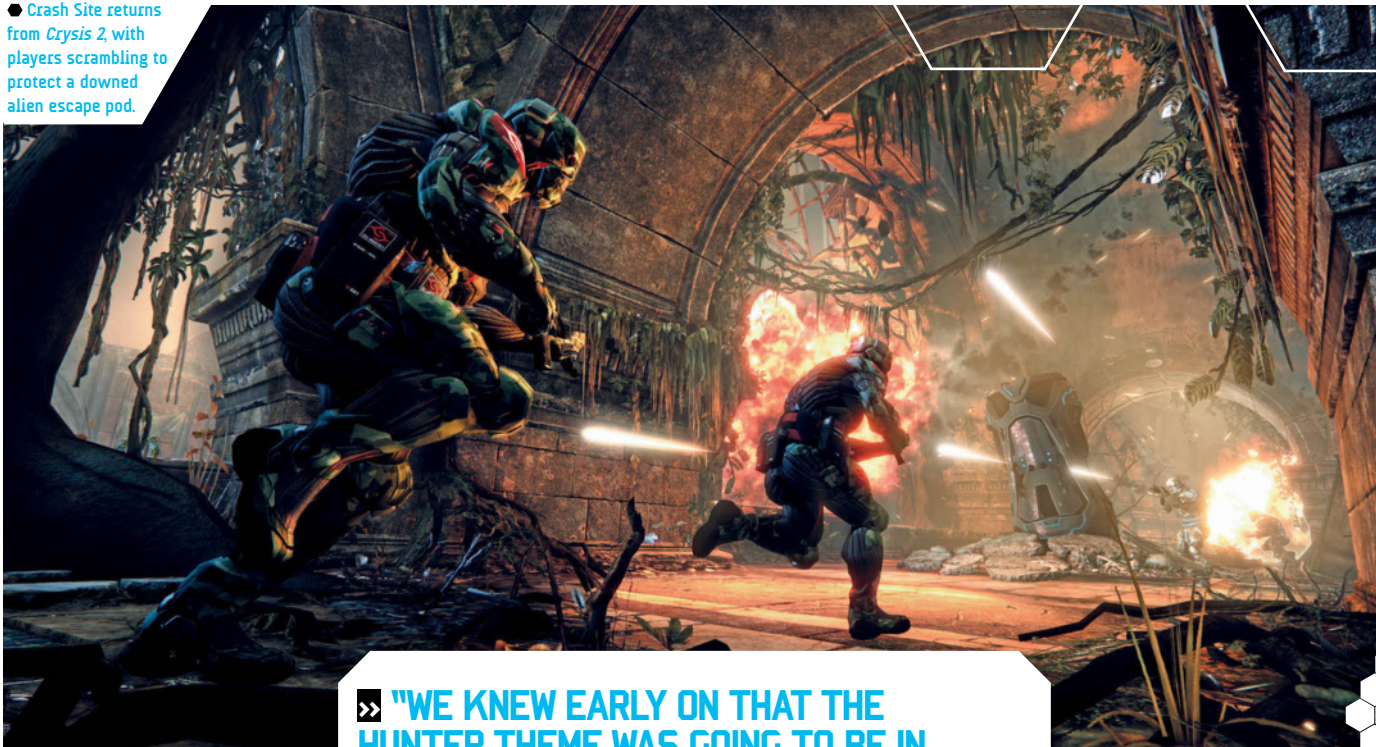
>> "WE KNEW EARLY ON THAT THE HUNTER THEME WAS GOING TO BE IN THERE, BUT IT WAS A QUESTION OF WHAT IS THE ULTIMATE HUNTER WEAPON"
MIKE READ, CRYTEK

but just occasionally it's used to reference that Eighties action movie wherein Carl Weathers got his arm blown off and Arnold Schwarzenegger outwitted an alien by rolling around in the mud.

To gain a full understanding of how Crytek has jammed to this theme – the stripped down man using cunning to survive a invisible marauder – we turn our attention to the multiplayer. In the new Hunter mode, two players are given a Nanosuit and a composite bow each and are tasked with hunting down the ten surviving CELL troops roaming around the map within two minutes. CELL troops get more substantial firepower and one radar grenade, but must face an invisible enemy that could be stalking its prey from any dark recess. The longer the CELL survive, the more points they claim, but after a CELL player is killed, they join the hunter force and must then track down previous allies.

"Whenever I watch people play, I always think, 'Are they enjoying it?'" Duckett muses after **games™** finishes a lengthy session of the mode. "And then, when you speak to someone afterwards, you can tell that they did. See, it's all the tension – all the stuff you don't

see. And that's what we wanted to do. We really tried to play on the fear of the player. Then, on the flipside, once you are eliminated, you have the adrenaline rush of them becoming a hunter. It's trying to incorporate two different emotions and styles of play into one quick round burst. The feedback we've been getting so far has been quite positive."

It's easy to see why. It's a nerve-shredding experience on the CELL side, with players either forming a solid unit to cover every angle or splintering off and finding an appropriate hiding place to wait it out. No one strategy could guarantee success, and the bleep of the CELL troops' proximity alarm as a hunter approaches is unremittingly chilling. In fact, it bears more in common with the template of another interstellar movie property than anything overtly familiar to the average *Call Of Duty* player.

"It has a certain *Alien* aspect to it," laughs Duckett when we note the similarity. "We looked at the Nanosuit

and thought, 'How can we take the most unique aspect of *Crysis 3* and what can we do to bring that into a game mode?' And what's more scary than being stalked by someone you can't see?'"

>> There's certainly more than a passing resemblance to the eponymous extraterrestrial that terrorised Arnie and chums back in the jungle. Heck, it could be more than passing if we find out Prophet is rocking a mean set of dreads underneath that fetching mask and ski goggles. But stylish hairdos notwithstanding, it's the way that both stalk their quarry, utilise the verticality of the environment and employ a stealth cloak to conceal their movements that set them apart from the military grunts roaming unsuspectingly on terra firma. Previous *Crysis* games have buoyed stealth gameplay by championing firearms that expand the sci-fi landscape, often encouraging

the same hurried blasting of its genre contemporaries. But *Crysis 3* takes a slightly different tack. It's not quite trading in its NRA membership yet, but the aforementioned composite bow was an idea that the studio kept returning to during development that defined the tone of the title. "There was a whole slew of [weapons] that came through that we looked at," details Read. "The bow was a rejected concept that came back in at some point in the development process."

Still, while it seems a natural fit for the series, Read is uncertain how gamers will embrace the new weapon and, as we suggest it might skew towards more stealth-minded soldiers, he's quick to stress its versatility. "We're not pushing people towards doing that. In terms of how much do we think people will use the bow, I don't think there's an easy way to answer that question. You're going to have some people who are going to use it and play with it all the way through, others who will use it in combinations, and others who will sit back cloaked and pick guys off from a distance. Some of the stuff we've seen is guys are doing flying jumps with the bow and all sorts of stuff

COMMUNITY MATTERS

>> IN MUCH THE same way as *Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit* and *Battlefield 3* revolutionised in-game community interaction, *Crysis 3* introduces the New York Feed, which will keep players better connected

EA has become something of a pioneer when it comes to in-game community features throughout its major titles. *Need For Speed* set the ball rolling with Autolog, which

enabled players to challenge each other, compare race times and exchange heated words without even exiting the main menu.

With *Crysis 3* adopting a similar format with New York Feed, producer Mike Read explains the renewed focus on community. "I've never been the achievement type in games," he admits. "But I've got friends who are like, 'I've

got to find an achievement server and get on there and get these!' I'm like, 'Why don't you play the game naturally?' But people get obsessed with achievements and I think instead of everyone going for the same achievements back and forth, it's important to have dynamic achievements. It all lends itself to the competitive side of the game and that's really important."

● **Above:** Concept art for multiplayer map Museum. **Below:** The map in action from a flipped perspective.
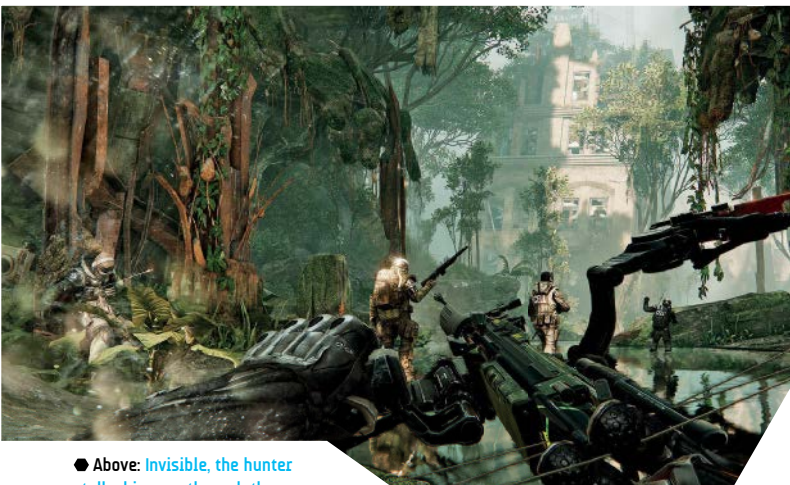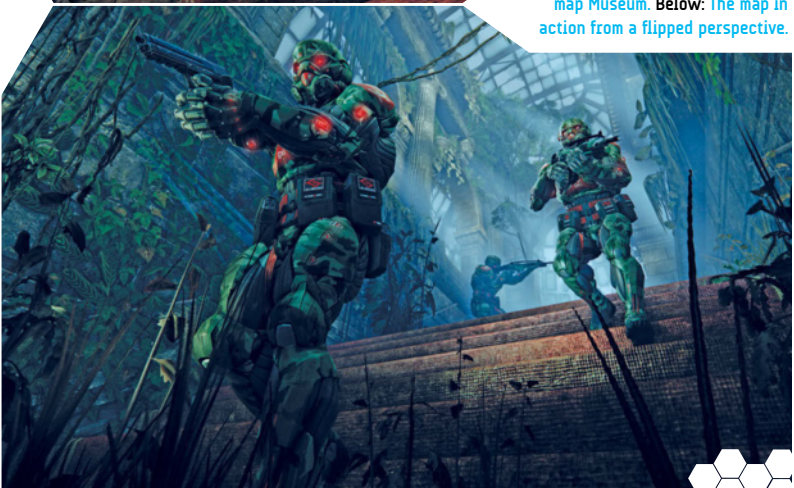
● **Above:** Invisible, the hunter stalks his prey through the swampy ruins of the museum map.
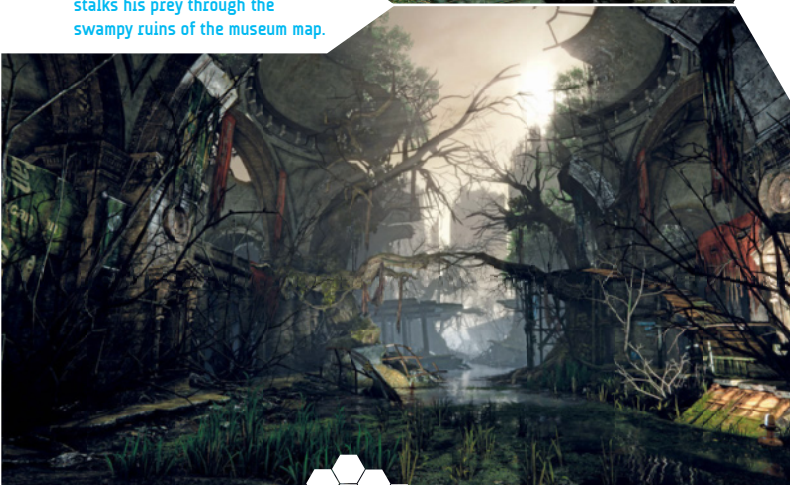
RADICAL INFLUENCE

● We talk to Adam Duckett, former Free Radical developer and now lead multiplayer designer at Crytek, about Crysis 3's competitive modes

How has the Nanosuit evolved since *Crysis 2*? Was there any particular element of the suit's design that received an overhaul?

Well, we haven't been afraid to look at energy management based on what works both for the single-player and what works for the multiplayer. We looked at the multiplayer Nanosuit and said, 'What's cool about it?' and, 'How can we make it work better in an online environment?' So you have the auto-armour module and the decoupling of sprint energy. So when you're running around today in *Crysis 2*, you're gradually eating into your armour deposit, whereas what we've done is we've said that people want to run around and want to stealth. We've kind of taken the shackles off and so you can do all that cool stuff, and when you get into a firefight you're still evenly balanced against that other player. That's really helped the new players coming in; we've noticed improvements in newer players versus more skilled players.

It's especially noticeable in Crash Site, as you run from one side of the map to the other. Previously you'd be too drained to hold back enemy fire, but this evens the playing field somewhat.

I think that was the thing with Crash Site particularly. If you died and then had to use all your energy to get back to the same point, you're turning up with a severe disadvantage over the guys just sitting there. So we ended up with that scenario in *Crysis 2*, and with *Crysis 3* we've just been able to alleviate those balancing issues so it's a cleaner, crisper online experience.

Do you feel the new setting is more versatile? There's certainly a greater sense of freedom to the map design.

What we've been able to do is have more power routes – more routes that require Nanosuits. So like the trees that go over the top on Museum. You can really bring in routes that people will find on their second or third play of the map, that they're like, 'Oh cool, how do you get up there?' and really expanding the level. We've created softer boundaries around the outside that creates these huge vistas. We've got some maps coming up that will really help to showcase that. It makes the player feel like they're actually

in the *Crysis* universe and not penned into this multiplayer pit or arena and makes it feel very expansive.

Where did the concept for the Hunter mode come from?

The original idea was based on an old *TimeSplitters* game we worked on. It was the Gladiator game mode, where you had one player and you kill them and it flips them, and it evolved from that.

Success in the mode seems very dependent on the player reading their surroundings as much as anything else.

When you've got a swamp where you've got the flooding and its murky, you're almost trained to look out for the footsteps in the water. There will be other maps with similar elements, like long grass where you'll be able to see grass displacing and track them that way. So really playing into the environments that we've created to make the game mode feel more immersive and suspenseful.

How much of the Free Radical influence is present in *Crysis 3*?

I think there's a certain fun aspect to the multiplayer, which I think is based on the fact that there's a substantial amount of Free Radical guys there, and one of the things that the company is known for is bringing that fun element to games. Something we wanted to bring to the *Crysis 3* multiplayer is to give it a unique feel like our previous games have done, make it fun, make it feel fast, and make it feel enjoyable.

Is it difficult to make *Crysis 3* stand out as a multiplayer title?

Again, I think it's the uniqueness to it. We're never going to carve our way into the market by looking at what other games have done and producing a similar game. So you've got stuff like the rip and throw mechanic, the Pinger; you've got the cool Nanosuit abilities and you've got the Ceph, which brings in alien technology as one of the weapons. You've got cool things like going over to a street sign and being able to pull it out of the ground and then you've got a giant baseball bat with a lump of concrete on the end that you can use to clear the way instead of a gun. People can make those stories within the game because of the environment, and that particular superpower allows that stuff within our game world.

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS
How Crysis 3 is fusing together the best bits of the franchise

CRYSIS	CRYSIS 3	CRYSIS 2

CHARACTER

● THE FIRST entry in the saga had more of a squad mentality than the games that followed. While Nomad was the clear hero at the centre of the game, his supporting troops were distinctive enough to make this more than just a story of a lone warrior.

● STRIVING FOR deeper characterisation, *Crysis 3* will feature familiar supporting players to interact with Prophet. *Crysis* and *Crysis Warhead* character Psycho has been confirmed to return, but there's also a greater reliance on Prophet's own abilities.

● THE SEQUEL had a soldier stumble over the body of Prophet and take his guise. No surprise that it's a more solitary tale, with the hero relying on all his skill to survive the invasion. There was a pervading sense of disconnect from the rest of humanity.

MULTIPLAYER

● *CRYSIS* SET the template for multiplayer in the series. Aiming to offer an alternative to the standard modes found in other shooters, its main focus was on Power Struggle, which pitted two teams against one another as they fight to destroy the opposition's headquarters.

● ONCE AGAIN, new modes are at the forefront of the multiplayer experience. Crytek UK's Hunter mode serves as a perfect example of how to create engaging multiplayer experiences by making the best use of the resources at hand.

● WITH THE former Free Radical team on multiplayer, there was no shortage of invention in *Crysis 2*'s online battleground. Understanding the potential of the Nanosuit and tailoring modes to exploit it made multi more than a throwaway experience.

LOCATION

● THE LUSH tropical paradise, full of stunning vistas, offered a versatile stomping ground for the game's protagonist to conceal himself. It was the ultimate hunting arena that complemented both the gameplay and the stunning power of CryEngine.

● THE GAME returns to New York, but the city has been ravaged by time. Buildings lie in ruin, vegetation has reclaimed much of it, and the Big Apple is divided into zones. This enables Crytek to apply the original's versatility to a recognisable backdrop.

● AIMING FOR a more bombastic tone, the location switched to the towering skyscrapers and iconography of New York City. While Crytek took great pleasure in levelling the place, it was a more restrictive environment than its predecessor.

rather than just doing it with standard projectile weapons."

No doubt players will discover a logic behind this back-to-basics approach embraced by franchise stalwart Prophet, and what exactly he's doing roaming around the swampy depths of the sequel's setting. Crytek remains as elusive as *Crysis*'s star when it comes to plot specifics, refusing to confirm details outside the back-of-the-box synopsis. We do know that the story has Prophet – or whoever he is at the end of *Crysis 2*'s befuddling conclusion – returning to New York City some 24 years after the events of the previous game, discovering that the corrupt CELL Corporation has encased the American city in a giant dome, creating seven distinct and hazardous environments that players must venture through.

>> No doubt there will be more intricate deceits, technological theorems and plot twists to make up the game time, but Read is aware that *Crysis 2*'s convoluted storytelling had a somewhat divisive effect on players.

"Richard Morgan [sci-fi author and *Crysis 2* writer] had a great take and he's a very smart man," says Read in defence of *Crysis 2*'s writer. "Even when you read his books, he gets very technical and he loves that deep sci-fi element, and we had a lot of that in *Crysis 2* mixed in with the story. Now we have Steven Hall, and the one thing that the story guys really wanted to do that didn't really hit the mark in *Crysis 1* and *Crysis 2* is create a better connection with the characters."

One aspect of an effort to support deeper characterisation was the decision to employ actors rather than voices, improving physicality and the overall performance. "The one thing our animation and story guys wanted to do was hire actors for more than just their voices. We have their likeness, their movements, their faces – it's all of these things," says Read. "We've basically hired actors as a complete job. I think some people got really confused in *Crysis 2* with some of the technical elements and we got very techy with it, which was cool and it went very deep on a lot of things, but the story kind of got backed off a little bit and we get a lot of story questions from people. 'What happened in this?' and 'What happened with this guy? Where did he go?' There are answers to a lot of these things, and some of these things are going to come out in *Crysis 3* in delivering a deeper story."

While *Crysis 3* might not deliver the same visual sucker-punch as its predecessors, the environment is still undoubtedly the star of the show. New York has been completely transformed after the events of the last game, and this new mossy metropolis offered fertile ground for the developer to explore and return to the franchise's roots.

"With *Crysis 2*, we were very limited by having the city grid and dealing with that, and all the buildings were still intact," remembers Read, clearly chuffed at getting the chance to rip the city to pieces. "I think people who played *Crysis* felt *Crysis 2* was linear in more ways than one. People were responding by saying they felt really enclosed – it was like being in a tight space, where maybe you have many ways to go but it doesn't feel like it because of the visual reference. In *Crysis*, you had these places where you could swim around in open waters, so for us it was about combining both of those."

That's not to say that *Crysis 3* is an apology for its predecessor, but Read, who joined Crytek after *Crysis 2*, continues to highlight areas that the studio was less than content with last time. "When I first played *Crysis 2*, it was like, 'Oh my god. I'm so overwhelmed. I've got this power bar, this cloak, all these things,'" he remarks, referring specifically to the multiplayer. "I think what the guys at the Nottingham office have done is create a little less of a barrier of entry, so that people don't get frustrated and creating a better learning curve."

Part of this involves softer rules on the Nanosuit itself. Dispensing with some of the unnecessary complexity involved in the armour modules, players will now find Prophet able to run without eating into the armour energy, and the armour module itself will be automatically activated while under fire.

It's simple improvements to the fundamental mechanics that seem to make a world of difference in the sequel. Even the simple act of grabbing enemies – a franchise staple – has been giving a do-over, now offering more than just a cheap laugh as players chuck a turtle into the sea or, more effectively, an enemy over the top of a skyscraper. It's a gameplay feature that feels much more raw and scrappy, enabling players to tear car doors off their hinges and use them as an impromptu shield, or to rip signposts from the concrete sidewalk to wield as a makeshift melee weapon.

What it does is transform *Crysis* into a more streamlined and focused experience, enabling players to concentrate on the immediate intensity of the firefight and not fumbling around between Nanosuit abilities. In its own way, it has become perfectly evolved; a congruent blend of everything that made the first two entries such a success, with barely any evidence of the chaff that belittled the experience. There's a deeper, richer world at the player's feet and one that's uniquely designed around the prowess of the protagonist's superhuman abilities, rather than the latter being shoehorned into the former. It's nothing less than a leaner, meaner and significantly greener beast. And while it's no longer priding itself on its aesthetic muscle, there's little doubt that it'll pack plenty of punch.

CRYSIS BY NUMBERS

» OVER **30** WEAPONS

» **8** MULTIPLAYER GAME MODES

» **12** MULTIPLAYER MAPS

» **7** WONDERS (UNIQUE TERRAINS ACROSS NEW YORK CITY)

» SET **24** YEARS AFTER CRYSIS 2

"The colour scheme is pure Eighties nightclub… and the opening sequence echoes a 16-bit Commando"
ALEX TROWERS, BOSS ALIEN, DESIGNER

Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon

ALEX TROWERS
DESIGNER, BOSS ALIEN

" *It has dragons in it. Not only that, but the dragons fire laser beams from their eyes. What do you mean that's not enough? The colour scheme is pure Eighties nightclub and the soundtrack could have been lifted from any action movie of the era. The opening sequence echoes a 16-bit* Commando; *the first mission is pure* Predator. *The tutorial… is frankly hilarious for any number of reasons, which easily makes it the Best Tutorial Ever.*

But what about the game itself? Well it's a pretty solid FPS, as you'd expect seeing as how it's basically Far Cry 3. *There's some open world, and the method of assaulting each enemy compound is left entirely up to the player. Guns blazing? Stealth? Or just dropping the Mega Shields, allowing the Blood Dragons in. It's the humour and reverence to the theme that wins it for me. That and the dragons.* "

After a decade dominating the battlefield, the last couple of years have seen Call of Duty withdraw to the defensive. Now, after spending the last three years mounting a counter-attack, games™ speaks to the studio responsible for bringing the world's biggest game back on track

FALL OF

You've heard it before: this is the year *Call Of Duty* ushers in a revolution. There's the promise of an overhaul to the design principles; a renewed focus on storytelling (emphasised either by the presence of a Hollywood writer or actor); and, lest we forget the series' signature USP, a rebalanced multiplayer experience destined to reinstate it as the tactical benchmark in competitive online gaming. In truth, *COD*'s efforts to surprise and innovate over the years have become as predictable as its signature parade of retina-singeing explosions. But what else would you expect from the most profitable videogame franchise ever created?

But three years is a long time. It's the crucial difference between a studio given the room to cultivate an idea, take risks and allow it to mature into a cohesive product, and a game that is designed specifically to meet a predetermined release date on an investor's calendar. This is the quandary that *Call Of Duty* has faced since it ditched the trenches of WWII: every year millions of fans gather for gaming's biggest event, each looking for just enough iteration to the series' rigidly planted checklist of features to consume their gaming habit for the next twelve months. With two studios systematically alternating on a two-year development cycle to feed the habit, constantly lumbering the weight of a looming deadline, finding the room to innovate without alienating its core audience has been a seemingly insurmountable task. But things are about to change.

"Meaningful, un-ignorable innovation," declared Activision CEO Eric Hirshberg addressing the issue when he took the stage at August's *Call Of Duty: Advanced Warfare* event in Cologne. "[Bringing this] to the *COD* franchise, while at the same time staying true to the things that people know and love about *COD*, is no easy challenge." But what Hirshberg outlines as a dramatic shake-up to the franchise isn't so much a change in course for the series itself (although, *Advanced Warfare* does push the series further into futuristic territory) but a change in the company's mindset. With Infinity Ward a relative husk since the mass exodus of 2010 (although it recently absorbed NeverSoft into its hallowed »

○ Development began on *Advanced Warfare* shortly after the studio finished co-development with Infinity Ward on *Modern Warfare 3*. For much of its production the game was being developed under the codename Blacksmith.

DUTY

> # "We need to bring something for the fans, something for ourselves, something that everybody can get behind, and really push the franchise forward"
>
> *Greg Reisdorf, Sledgehammer Games*

halls) and Treyarch promoted to the lead studio, it wasn't just time for a creative rethink but an entirely new perspective. Enter Sledgehammer Games, the studio given an unprecedented three years and creative freedom to redefine *Call Of Duty* for a new generation.

Sledgehammer had a trial run before it secured the gig. *Advanced Warfare* may signal the first *COD* title that the studio has spearheaded but it also worked with Infinity Ward – not long after the infamous exit of Jason West and Vince Zampella – co-developing *Modern Warfare 3*, and before that was working on a story-driven (and rumoured third-person) *COD* title that was eventually scrapped. But with its own set of ideas and aspirations intended to revamp the formula, the studio has its eyes fixated on the future. 2054 to be precise, where advanced military technology has ushered in the age of the super soldier; augmented by exoskeletons, soldiers have increased speed, strength and agility to navigate through the battlefield like never before.

"It was tough in the beginning to get that idea of where that line was, how far we could go with it," Sledgehammer's Greg Reisdorf, lead multiplayer designer at the studio, admits when discussing the futuristic setting of *Advanced Warfare*. "It's been a great time with that. Like, there's a 3D-printed weapon. When we first talked about that years ago it was outrageous – like how could you have a 3D weapon? That's crazy. Then it's all about that problem solving around how it would actually work, how it would have a 3D printer – would it print into the magazine? Well then nobody would ever have to reload. So it prints to the ammo reserve – but how does that look, how does that function with our reload mechanics and speed reloading? All those things, and it's just been... that's been a lot of fun through the project."

Reisdorf is specifically highlighting the impact that the new setting has on arguably the most integral feature to *COD*'s

○ The studio wanted to base the game in a period of time that would enable them to push technology but still ground it within realism. While it may share a few superficial similarities to *Titanfall*, it doesn't go quite as extreme.

○ Sledgehammer researched advancements in military tech, basing a lot of the weapons and gadgets on reality.

A GUIDE TO ADVANCED WARFARE'S MAPS
games™ casts an analytical eye over the new killing grounds in the latest Call Of Duty
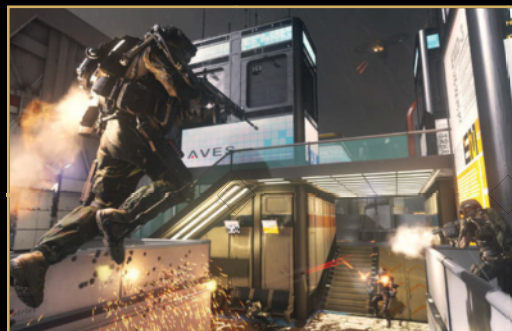
Ascend
■ AN INTRICATE labyrinth of pathways that make it an ideal map for objective-based game modes. Once again close-quarter combat would seem to be preferential here, but Sledgehammer has added a nice twist in a new system of map-based Scorestreaks. Teams are able to hack into the map's automated sentry system and unleash a furious attack on enemies around the level.
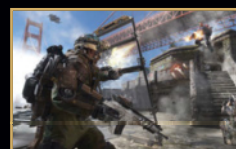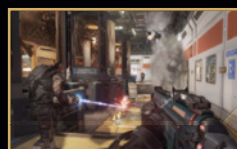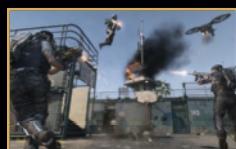
Riot
■ LIKE MANY of the maps in *Advanced Warfare*, everything seems relatively standard until you put your Exo-suit into good use. Riot is a burnt-out husk of a prison, featuring a series of walkways and a second floor that can be accessed by a quick double-jump. Canny players might take advantage of players who accidently set off the metal detectors, but those looking to camp will find themselves exposed. It's a great map for energetic close-quarter combat.

Biolab
■ A TRADITIONAL map layout geared towards team deathmatch, there's not a huge amount of verticality to the arena – the whole area is pretty flat both exterior and interior – which means you'll likely want to keep your boots firmly planted on the ground. The design is an old science laboratory, complete with floating bodies in test tubes, which means there are both small pathways and open areas that encourage a variety of different playstyles.

Defender
■ WHILE SLEDGEHAMMER has gone back to *Black Ops II* for influence when it comes to its Pick 13 system, it doesn't completely ignore *Ghosts*' multiplayer efforts. Defender features a gargantuan dynamic event that consumes part of the level, with a tidal wave wiping out the shore and any players who happen to be caught in the area. It's also the map that has been designed specifically for Uplink mode, with plenty of high vantage points and structures.
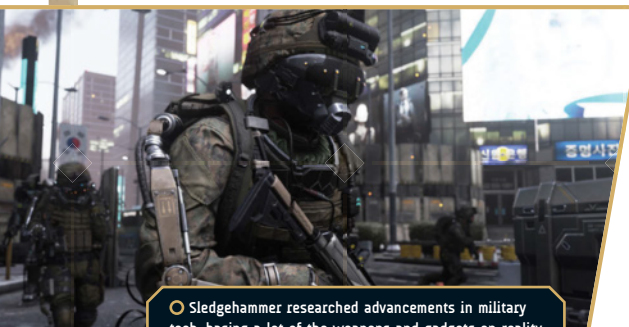
success: multiplayer. We've seen before how the new setting and technology has enhanced the histrionics of the single-player campaign. Rocket-jumping over obstacles in your path and boosting into cover, slowing down time with Overdrive and using the strength of the exoskeleton to rip-off car doors to use as protection. There are subtler features too, with digital projections of the environment and stripped-back HUD elements recalling the studio's previous life working on the original *Dead Space*.
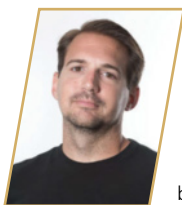
All of these are added to the usual cocktail of absurdist fiction and bombastic spectacle – a particular standout level involves the destruction of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge (the new White House when it comes to Hollywood's penchant for obliterating its own iconography), which collapses on a US aircraft carrier passing underneath it. Sledgehammer has no intention of reinventing the wheel clearly; instead it's reconfiguring the mechanism that makes it spin. And there's no better place to look for an example of this than in the multiplayer.

"It's allowed us to do a ton of stuff, to look at all aspects of the game and figure out what we can innovate," says Reisdorf. "From big things like Exo movement, supply drops, the virtual lobby and virtual firing range to much smaller things around even how the mini-map works, smaller little details within active-sight, speed-reloading, various little features. It's also allowed us to take those larger features and really go in and dig in deep to how they're balanced, how they work, the fluidity of all the Exo movement combines together and just really hone in on that intuitive experience off the controller."

This comes down, quite specifically, to mobility. The presence of the exoskeleton reimagines the player with superpowers, which has a drastic impact on how the game *feels* when you hit the online battlefield. Thrusters mounted on your metallic frame enable you to boost in a double- »

GREG REISDORF,
SLEDGEHAMMER
GAMES

THE CALL OF DUTY TIMELINES

Untangling the multiple universes of Call Of Duty

■ Advanced Warfare Timeline 2054-?

■ Ghosts Timeline 2017-2027

■ Zombies Timeline 1913-2025

■ Modern Warfare Timeline 1917-2017

■ Black Ops Timeline 1904-2026

■ World War II Timeline 1894-1945

1890 1900 1910 1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010 2020 2030 2040 2050 2060

> *"It was tough in the beginning to get that idea of where that line was, how far we could go with it"*
>
> Greg Reisdorf, Sledgehammer Games

○ There's a new class of energy-driven 'beam' weapons that don't have ammo. Instead, they take time to cool down and recharge.

○ Kevin Spacey not only provided his voice to Jonathan Irons, but also took part in motion capture sessions, enabling the animators to capture the nuance of his performance.

HOLLYWOOD CALLS

Kevin Spacey is starring in *Advanced Warfare* but he isn't the only acting royalty to appear in the series so far

Jason Statham

Character: Sergeant Waters
Game: Call Of Duty

■ Hollywood hardnut Jason Statham was the original *Call Of Duty* star, lending his gravelly larynx to the first entry in the ubiquitous series. If there's any movie star you'd follow into a real war, it'd probably be The Stath.

Gary Oldman

Character: Viktor Reznov
Game: World At War/Black Ops

■ Tinker? Tailor? Nope. Just soldier and spy will do for Gary in Treyarch's first two entries in the studio's trilogy-of-sorts. Disguising his cockney heritage under a thick Russian accent, Oldman's Victor Reznov was a favourite among fans.

Ed Harris

Character: Special Agent Jason Hudson
Game: Black Ops

■ Bringing his gruff attitude to the franchise as the no-nonsense special agent barking orders in *Black Ops*, Harris brought much of his domineering screen presence to the relatively small part in Treyarch's game.

Sam Worthington

Character: Alex Mason
Game: Black Ops/Black Ops II

■ Hot off the back of *Avatar*, the charisma vacuum from down under lent his talents (or his voice at least) to Treyarch's *Black Ops* and its sequel as the protagonist in both. Treyarch seems to have a penchant for attracting hot Hollywood talent.

Michael Rooker

Character: Himself/Mike Harper
Game: Black Ops/Black Ops II

■ The guy who played Merle Dixon, the racist redneck in *The Walking Dead* – although he's been seen more recently playing that mystical blue-faced guy in *Guardians Of The Galaxy* – played himself in the horror icons DLC of *Black Ops* before playing a separate fictional character in the game's sequel.

Ice Cube

Character: Joseph Bowman
Game: Black Ops

■ Another *Black Ops* vet, rapper-cum-actor Ice Cube tones down his usual macho bravado in a supporting role in Treyarch's game. The character of Bowman is also likened on the actor.

Kiefer Sutherland

Character: Sgt. Roebuck
Game: World At War

■ Before he was Solid Snake, Mr. Sutherland shouted 'Dogs!' a lot across both *World At War*'s campaign and its multiplayer mode. It might not have required him to prance about in a skin-tight suit covered in balls but Sutherland gives it real gusto.

Brandon Routh

Character: David 'Hesh' Walker
Game: Ghosts

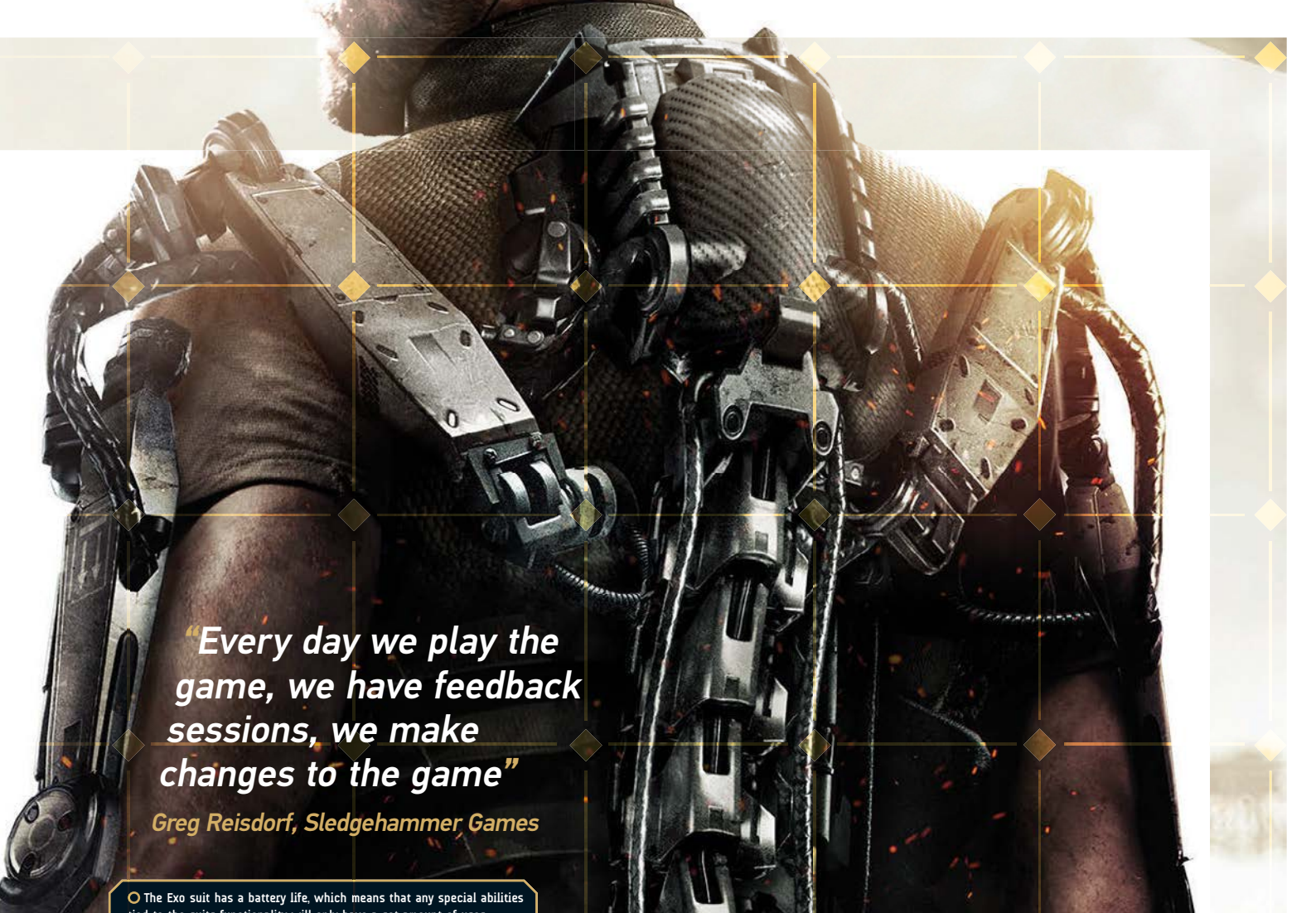■ His role in the last *COD* title is quite a substantial one but his presence wasn't given the due attention afforded to other stars.

jump-type action, with a further boost added for a mid-air dodge in any direction (including down for a ground pound).

Adding to the basic functionality of the Exo suit in multiplayer are a suite of abilities that further add a sci-fi edge to the proceedings. There's a Cloak and Shield that both do exactly what you'd expect, while Overclock increases your speed briefly. Another improves health temporarily, while others show Exo movements on the map and destroy incoming enemy projectiles. As you can tell, nothing here is outside the realm of plausibility and grounding the future with tangible actions has been a cornerstone to *Advanced Warfare*'s design.

"It's always about going back to the main goal which we had from the beginning, which was gun-skill," says Reisdorf. "Everything has to enhance that. Everything with the Exo-movement has to enhance that. Everything within the modes has to enhance that. Everything within the maps has to enhance that. Having that goal to always point back to has been a huge guiding factor within everything we do in the game." It's easy to imagine how all of the enrichments can benefit tactics on the field. Quickly skirting out of cover to take down an enemy, covering ground with huge leaps across the maps, while darting around the air makes for a harder target to hit. Despite obvious parallels to similar features found in *Titanfall* and *Halo*, the decision to push action off the ground and add more urgency makes for a faster, more engaging experience. In fact, it demands a complete relearning of *Call Of Duty* multiplayer.

t could be argued that this rethink has been long overdue. After all, the first-person shooter genre is no longer just a battle for the armchair soldier, but the thousands of players worldwide that take part on a competition level. "We learn a ton from the competitive community," admits Reisdorf. "A lot

> ## "Every day we play the game, we have feedback sessions, we make changes to the game"
>
> *Greg Reisdorf, Sledgehammer Games*

○ The Exo suit has a battery life, which means that any special abilities tied to the suits functionality will only have a set amount of uses.

of people tend to freak out when they hear that, but it's not like they're dictating the game. But we listen to them in the sense of if the game's not competitive or they're able to find exploits or anything like that, the game is no longer balanced at that point, and it's no longer fun for everyone. However, if we can make it competitive at that level it's going to be competitive for everybody, it's going to be fun for everybody." It's a new balance that *COD* has had to take into consideration in recent years: appeasing the usual mass of casual players alongside the emergence of eSport culture. It's not just about crafting a game for someone to play, but one that people also will enjoy watching.
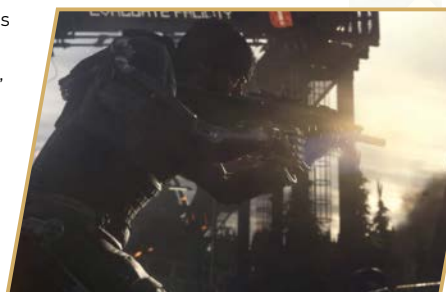
"We do have some different approaches," responds Reisdorf when **gamesTM** asks him whether there's a different design methodology when catering for viewers as well as players. "I think there are some different angles to look at it that actually help provide some context to why we would do various things. There are certain modes like domination that work for eSports and competitive modes, but at the same time they have multi-point objectives so they're a little harder to view, a little harder to understand, little harder to follow."

Sledgehammer took that comparison and realised that having a multi-point objective mode wasn't just hard to actually watch but also to play within that ultra-competitive environment. "It's hard to play at that point," says Reisdorf, "because you have to know those points are moving, that those points are being taken, who's taking what point just to convey that information as they're playing, as they're doing

all this new Exo-movement, as they're doing all these things it gets complicated fast. To kind of bring that back to a level of 'Just go from point A to point B' and it's all about gun skill, movement, that tactical combat – and really encouraging that with the mode itself."

This is where the newest multiplayer mode enters the fray: Uplink. Much more akin to a traditional sport, opposing teams race to capture two coloured balls (Satellites) dotted around the map and return them to their specific goal matrix to score points. Throwing the Satellite through the target scores one, while carrying it through the goal nets you two. However, while carrying the ball removes the ability to use a weapon, the ball can be tossed to free up your hands once more – you can even throw it an enemy to catch, therefore sacrificing their own gun and giving back yours for a skilful kill.

"One of the things around Uplink that we really wanted to do was to create a single point objective mode," explains Reisdorf. "By single point I mean a place where we could really focus the combat and have something where players are moving to that area to engage, in order to make viewing much nicer and to make the experience like 'I know where I'm going, I'm going to the objective'. That's where people are going to be, that's where the fun and excitement happen. To make that more interesting and build on top of that is where all the other mechanics come from, with the **»**

○ New multiplayer mode Uplink focuses the gameplay and turns *COD* into a ball game of sorts. It's a eSport-friendly new competitive mode.

Exo-movement allowing for players to jump into the goal or throw items in, using their Exo abilities as they're grabbing the Satellite and moving it from one end of the map to the other... the elements really made the mode stand out, especially for what we were trying to do with all the new movements. They work very well together."

This inevitably feeds back into the new Exo abilities and the choices that the player will make to hone the skills of their fighter. Moreover, the studio is further emphasising the importance of straightforward competitive play with a return to a fan-favourite class system. While *Black Ops II* multiplayer barely set the world alight compared to its predecessors, it's generally regarded at Sledgehammer as the best iteration of the multiplayer to date, which is down, in some part, to its Pick 10 system.

Where *Ghosts* abandoned this concept, *Advanced Warfare* adapts it into the Pick 13 system. In Pick 10, players were no longer consigned to a specific number of weapons, perks, grenades and kill streaks. Instead it was based on a point system, where players could put points into whichever part of their class they desired. Not fussed about a second weapon but wanted more perks? That was fine. Want to load your guns with loads of attachments? That was possible too. It allowed the player to sculpt their character in whatever image they wished, without having to compromise due to enforced restrictions.

Pick 13 expands on this idea, adding a few more points to spend and more options to spend them on. There are further options for customisation as well. For example, Scorestreaks return from *Modern Warfare 3* that enable streak bonuses without having to achieve consecutive kills, while also adding modifiers and bonuses (and, in a series first, you can also choose zero Scorestreaks if that's your thing). For example, a traditional Scorestreak enables you to place a turret, but in *Advanced Warfare* you can modify it to fire rockets instead of bullets, or to allow you to rip it off its base and carry it around as a heavy weapon – all at the cost of extra points on the battlefield to achieve. It's a delicate balance and Sledgehammer understands the pressure and the backlash it'll face if the systems don't coalesce as expected.

"That gets into our process from the very beginning," Reisdorf says of the potential fan outrage. "Look, we play the game every day. Every day we play the game, we have feedback sessions, every day we make changes to the game, every day we look at the data we're getting from those play sessions, comparing it to the notes that we have from the players that have played the game. That's just a constant process, and it's been a constant process throughout development. And it'll be a constant process after we ship the game out."

All this talk of appeasing the *COD* converted and realigning the series to better serve the burgeoning eSport marketplace leaves out one important gamer: the newcomer. "We do have a new mode in the game that allows for less intimidation in the sense that you can go in and play against real players and bots, but have none of the stress of where everything's a competition," says Reisdorf. "It's not necessarily competition – it's how you can personally get better. It's all about your personal bests." Further fuelling this ethos is a simple addition that caught our attention. The Virtual Firing Range is one of those ideas that's so good you're surprised it isn't already genre standard. In between matches in multiplayer, players can instantly try out any changes to their class at a press of a button. This'll transport you into a firing range, enabling you to test your new gun, or attachment, equipment – pretty much everything. It's not only a feature that veteran players will reap the benefits from but also newcomers unsure of whether they're making the right decision when putting together their class.

But among the advancements there's also some cause for concern. A new Loot system rewards players for ranking up and meeting challenge objectives with a supply drop. These contain cosmetic items to pimp up your character, but also give out special versions of weapons. These drops come in three rarities – Enlisted, Professional and Elite – and the rarer these specialised weapons are, the more capable and feature-heavy they become. The worry is whether it'll be the elite players dominating these supply drops, giving the better players a further advantage on the battlefield. But Sledgehammer is aware that balance is a hyper-sensitive issue for players.

"We know it's a challenge, but we also have a lot of underlying systems that allow us to make balancing a little easier," reveals Reisdorf, putting us at ease a little." All the weapons have weapon signatures – basically unique

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SLEDGEHAMMER

■ *2005* Sledgehammer Games co-founders Schofield and Condrey work together for the first time on *007: From Russia with Love*

■ *2008* The duo work together once again on *Dead Space* – a defining title for EA

■ *2009* Schofield and Condrey split from EA and form their own studio, Sledgehammer Games

■ *2009* Sledgehammer Games pitch to Activision a story-driven, third-person *Call Of Duty* title

■ *2009* Activision acquires Sledgehammer and the studio starts building a prototype

■ *2010* The third-person game is scrapped as the team are called in to help support a short-staffed Infinity Ward with *Modern Warfare 3*

■ *2014* After collaborating with Infinity Ward on *Modern Warfare 3*, Sledgehammer reveals its first solo venture in the *COD* universe: *Advanced Warfare*
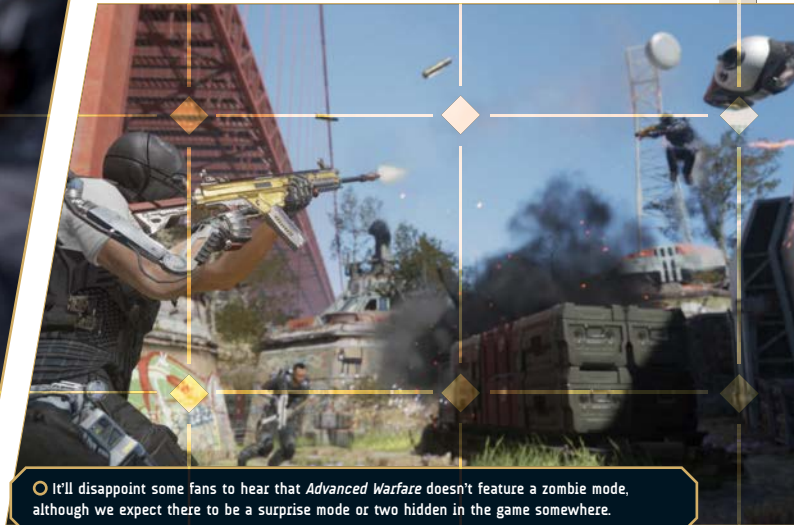
○ You can see the studio's heritage in the way the game looks. Much like Schofield and Condrey's work on *Dead Space*, *Advanced Warfare* takes major steps in integrating major elements of the HUD into the game world.

> **"This is our game, this is the game we're making, we're going to push forward towards our vision"**
>
> *Greg Reisdorf, Sledgehammer Games*

○ It'll disappoint some fans to hear that *Advanced Warfare* doesn't feature a zombie mode, although we expect there to be a surprise mode or two hidden in the game somewhere.

○ There are some interesting tech twists in *Advanced Warfare*, including multi-purpose grenades. Now you just hold a set number of grenades that have multiple settings, such as frag, sticky or stun. We predict this might cause some unnecessary fumbling on the battlefield.
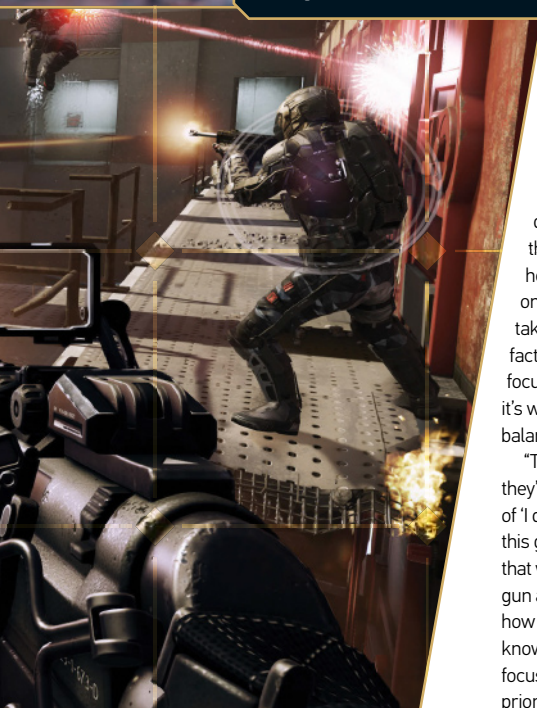
properties to those weapons that allow us to say 'Well this weapon fires faster the longer you fire it' – the loot variants of that weapon all feature that signature so we can now balance that in this category and we can make this category work with [another] category.

"Within Pick 13 we have wildcards, meaning if you want to take four perks you're going to have to take a wildcard which is going to be an extra point and you don't necessarily get anything for that point, other than the ability to take another perk Within the Scorestreaks," he continues. "If you're taking modules and adding things onto the Scorestreaks it's increasing the cost of what it takes to earn that Scorestreak, so there's inherent balance factors in that already. To take those elements and to just focus on them and to really look at them in the sense that it's what they do – it's their job to make sure the game is balanced, fair and has no exploits.

"They go into playtests and they're playing the game, they're also dealing with feedback for the players in terms of 'I don't think this gun is so great', 'I love this gun' and 'I love this gun too much, I use it all the time'. And then comparing that with the actual data, saying 'Well you say you use this gun all the time, but you don't.' So what's going on there, how does that work… There are a lot of aspects to it. We know that there are a lot of aspects to it, but just being focused on it since the very beginning has been a huge priority for us."

The key it seems to the future success of *Call Of Duty* isn't just by focusing on evolution but also in acknowledging its past. *Advanced Warfare* doesn't blithely ignore what has come before it (specifically adapting what Sledgehammer feels works *very* well in the case of the Pick 13 system), embracing the work of other studios and making sure that it stays true to the core tenets that make *Call Of Duty* the success it is. Part of that process is the continued support and input from Infinity Ward and Treyarch, guiding the studio through its freshman effort.

"The other studios are amazing," enthuses Reisdorf. "One of the best parts about the studio model and everything else is that all the studios have unique personalities and interesting people at each one; they all have their own opinions and everything else. We'll bounce ideas off each other to make the best game possible. There's collaboration there, but we're still [individual] studios; they're still the studio's own games."

Still, the feeling of pressure that comes with the sheer scale and responsibility of the project has not been lost on the team. This isn't just another iteration to pacify fans of the largest fan base in the world, but a sequel given the time, money and creative freedom to break new ground. "This is huge. It's an amazing thing to be part of," Reisdorf beams. "From the very beginning it's been 'How do we bring something to this?' This is our chance to really show up – we need to be there, we need to show up and we need to bring something for the fans, something for ourselves, something that everybody can get behind and really push the franchise forward. It's the biggest challenge we've ever faced as a studio."

THE SAVIOUR OF XBOX

HALO

UNCOVERING THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF MASTER CHIEF

Halo **is more than a game series. It's more than a Microsoft exclusive IP. It's more than a first-person shooter.** *Halo* is a landmark, a permanent installation in the culture of gaming. The iconic and imposing silhouette of Master Chief stands above everything Microsoft has achieved since launching its first games console – without Chief and the visionary studio behind him, the Xbox would have remained an outsider, an idea, an *other*.

In 2001, *Halo* did more than just revolutionise the first-person shooter; it validated an entire generation of uncertain hardware. The Xbox was seen as an outside force, a predator on the fringes of Sony and Nintendo's domain. And yet, five months after the game's launch, it broke records – the fastest-selling game of the sixth console generation, boosting the Xbox's sales by over 50 per cent in the process.

A previously little-known developer called Bungie had catapulted the Xbox and the first-person shooter to dizzying heights, setting a new standard for the genre on both PC and console. *Halo* revolutionised a stagnating genre, it proved that games didn't have to take themselves so seriously all the time. It proved that competitive player-on-player shooting could work on console, and it laid the foundations for one of the most complete and engrossing sci-fi worlds in fiction, let alone videogames.

Halo was born in 2001, but that was just the beginning. In a celebration of one of the most successful franchises our industry has ever seen, **gamesTM** has tracked down the creators and visionaries behind each instalment of the epic *Halo* saga and formed a comprehensive guide to *Halo*'s past, present and future. **»**
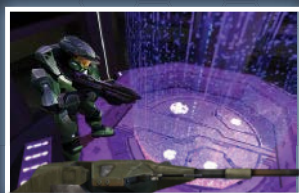
HALO
COMBAT EVOLVED

THE GAME THAT PROVED FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS WERE HERE TO STAY ON CONSOLES, HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED WAS A BREAKTHROUGH TITLE FOR MICROSOFT'S INFANT XBOX PLATFORM. INNOVATIVE AND BREATHTAKINGLY ORCHESTRATED, HALO'S BIRTH WAS THE RESULT OF A GROWING BUNGIE TEAM'S INSISTENCE ON 'MAKING SOMETHING GREAT'…

Year: 2001 System: Xbox

● Halo exploded on to the scene in 2001, launching its fledgling console, the original Xbox, into the business.

"**Halo was more than an innovation in first-person shooters,** it was a clarification," explains Jaime Griesemer, designer on *Combat Evolved*. "It was a simplification, or a purification. Because of the restrictions we had on the Xbox hardware, we had to get rid of a lot of elements that weren't really that important to us for an FPS."

Halo reinvented the first-person shooter, stripping it back from the PC format – excessive loadouts were replaced with a two-weapon system, and the control scheme overhauled completely from genre rivals to fit the hefty Xbox pad. *Halo* proved that the FPS was a console-friendly genre, and all it took was Master Chief and his aptitude with weapons to frame that in a way gamers would understand. It was a marriage of mechanics and narrative that empowered players, and justified Bungie's removal of a weapon wheel – something that was initially done

only because the original Xbox didn't have enough memory to allow Chief to have a whole arsenal on him at any one time.

"The main goal with Chief as a character was that he always had the ability to use the tools at his disposal well enough that he could accomplish any of his objectives," says Griesemer. "That meant we could put you in situations where you had a limited inventory, but make each thing you could carry potent enough to win any firefight. No combination of weapons would put you at a dead end."

This new restrictive system was merged with a new kind of open level design that first-person shooters hadn't really seen before. Rather than just ushering you from point A to point B, *Halo* created sandboxes for you to explore, and populated them with AI that understood how to take advantage of these open spaces; another first for the genre. Halo's alien-yet-familiar vistas and

sprawling open landscapes have come to define the series – and Bungie's design ethic – and were inspired by Microsoft's acquisition of the Bungie studio.

"During the early days of *Halo*, we were based in Chicago," explains *Combat Evolved*'s art director Marcus Lehto, "then when Microsoft purchased us, we moved out to the Pacific area – out to Seattle. When we got here, we were struck by the amazing beauty of the Cascade mountains, the ocean mouth, the sheer cliff walls, the waterfalls, the peninsula out here... that all massively influenced *Halo*, even down to the exploration. We put the player into – basically – a giant national park, to all intents and purposes, and we wanted them to explore this giant natural wonderland."

These beautiful levels went against the grain at the time. Whereas a lot of other games in the genre were built around earthy, dark colour

palettes, *Halo* was colourful and bright; spiritually reminiscent of the 3D-platformers that were dominating the industry a decade before – something that came into play in the verticality of the levels, and gave birth to the now-famous '*Halo* jump'.

"The level design we were after gave us a lot of geometry to play with," explains Griesemer. "And the funny thing is, all the physics in *Halo* are completely accurate to Earth's gravity – the reason they feel 'floaty' is because the camera's attached to the top of Chief's head: if you're eight and a half feet tall, that's how it's going to feel when you leap into the air. We couldn't tune that jump later on in development because by then we'd already designed all these

contrast to their overtly religious-cum-insectoid design.

"I'm a preacher kid," explains Lehto, who came up with the original concept of the Covenant. "I lived in a church growing up, and I saw the good side of organised religion and the bad side of it. Fundamentalism in any shape or form can be very dangerous, and we wanted to explore how that can translate into an alien culture and belief system." Pairing serious and socially critical themes –which are explored in the game's winding canon – with the in-game zaniness of what the AI could do was another fresh breath of air that Bungie breathed into the stagnating genre.

"Shortly after *Halo: CE* came out – around the time of the [DC sniper] – a news programme showed a video from

"HALO IS BASICALLY A GIANT NATIONAL PARK, AND WE WANTED PLAYERS TO EXPLORE THIS GIANT NATURAL WONDERLAND"

MARCUS LEHTO, ART DIRECTOR, HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED

platforms you needed to get on to progress through the game."

It could be argued that the '*Halo* jump' was a happy accident, then – another tool in the evolving skillset Chief was collecting, another facet that gilded the *Halo* experience with player empowerment, and granting the game a fun factor that console players hadn't really experienced in a shooter before. The enemy forces in the game – the Covenant – galvanised that less-than-serious feeling, too: the dwarf Grunts were the game's main cannon fodder, yet were oddly comical – a distinct

Halo, selling it as some kind of murder simulator," Griesemer tells us, "but if you knew *Halo* at all, you could tell it was just footage of this Grunt doing something goofy – *Halo* was not a dark, gritty experience and in a time where a lot of other titles were pessimistic, *Halo* told the story of humanity resisting, overcoming and *achieving* – it was something that resonated with a lot of people, and I hope one day we see more games turn back in that direction."

INTERVIEW
STEVE DOWNES
GAMES™ SPEAKS TO THE VOICE OF MASTER CHIEF

How did you first become involved with Bungie and the *Halo* franchise?
Bungie was originally based in Chicago, where I do my morning radio show on 97.1 WDRV "The DRIVE". Marty O'Donnell was a fan and asked me to do the voice of a character for a game he was working on called "Septera Core". About a year later he called me back to do the voice of Master Chief for their next game: *Halo*.

What's the *Halo* journey been like over the last decade?
The Chief has been on an amazing and challenging journey. One that I doubt even he expected. Certainly I didn't. He is obviously the strong silent type; he discovered that his strength, weaponry and skills on the battlefield would not be all he would need to see him through.

You weren't a gamer when you signed up to play Chief, has that changed?
No. It's good to know what you're good at and what you're not good at. And I learned early on that I would not be able to devote the time and energy necessary to be a good gamer. And I decided that if I couldn't be really good at it, I didn't want to play at all. I have the highest regard for those gamers out there who are accomplished. My interest in *Halo* has always been the story.

If Master Chief and Agent Locke (from *Halo 5*) walked into a bar and engaged in a fistfight, who would come out on top?
… Master Chief *always* finishes the fight.

PERFECTING THE FORMULA

Halo 2 didn't just introduce online functionality to *Halo* – it also brought smarter AI, new weapons and a pacier, more streamlined rhythm to how the game played. "*Halo 2* was closer to what we originally planned," reveals Jaime Griesemer – who was lead designer by the time *Halo 2* was in development. "*Halo 2* was a much quicker game – and I think that was a reaction to the direction shooters were going at that time. *Halo 2* sped up: people were getting better with controllers, and internet multiplayer required us to think more about how fast your shields recharged, and reload speeds and all that. We actually started designing the multiplayer first, which I think affected the game quite a lot."

Year: 2004 System: Xbox

HALO 2

WE LOOK DEEPER INTO JUST HOW BUNGIE CHANGED ONLINE MULTIPLAYER FOREVER

Halo 2 **was proof that a strong, online network could exist on a console.** Max Hoberman – who worked on the original iteration of *Halo 2* for Bungie, and recently the *Master Chief Collection*'s multiplayer as president of Certain Affinity – explains the process behind its conception.

What were the main things to consider when developing for this new online platform?
When we started on *Halo 2*, there was an opportunity to help shape the future of the Xbox Live service. As with all our work, we wanted to make sure that all of the online features that we requested support for were framed in a manner that would be broadly useful to other games. We were able to incorporate our dream features such as an instantly available friends list, matchmaking, rankings, and parties. These were ultimately broadly adopted by the Xbox Live team.

Was the team ever sceptical about trying to make online multiplayer on console as big as PC?
We always had a high level of confidence that *Halo 2*'s gameplay would attract a huge audience. Still, there was some trepidation inside of Bungie about the path that we'd chosen to take. The biggest point of contention was around our idea for a simple, automated matchmaking system - many long-time PC gamers reeled at the idea of giving up so much player control, and very vocally voiced their opinion that this would be rejected by players. This continued until we shipped and our big bet proved itself.

Halo 2 has some of the most famous map design – what's your personal favourite and why?
Halo 2 has amazing maps! My personal all-time favourite is Lockout - it's the perfect combination small-scale, fast-paced map, supporting ninja-like movement and expert grenade tosses (my best weapon!).

**We've heard you were one of two people working on Halo 2's multiplayer?**
When I started on *Halo 2*, Chris Carney, a very talented environment art lead, and I were the only people dedicated to multiplayer. My team also had a dedicated UI artist and a dedicated UI programmer, and then we got spare cycles here and there from other programmers. This was a blessing in disguise – a smaller team allowed us to hyper-focus, eliminating any room for error and ultimately getting it right the first time around. This is a big part of why I am such a meticulous planner, and this planning paid off in the long run.

What did Halo 2's multiplayer achieve that you're the most proud of?
As far as I'm concerned, *Halo 2* multiplayer did two things exceptionally well: first, it helped raise *Halo* to the position of "king of the multiplayer hill." Nothing could touch the popularity of the franchise for years, and this cemented the game as a fixture for multiplayer FPS gaming (including among the competitive crowd, which was unheard of for a console game at the time).

Second, it paved the way for the Xbox Live service as we know it and an entire generation of multiplayer games on console. Neither is a small feat, and I'd be hard pressed to say which I'm more proud of.
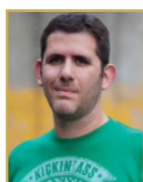
> ❝ THE BIGGEST POINT OF CONTENTION WAS AROUND OUR IDEA FOR A SIMPLE, AUTOMATED MATCHMAKING SYSTEM ❞
> MAX HOBERMAN, PRESIDENT, CERTAIN AFFINITY

HALO 3

THE GAME THAT SECURED THE XBOX 360'S DOMINANCE IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE 360/PS3 WAR, HALO 3 PUSHED THE THEN-NEW HARDWARE TO ITS LIMIT…

"We really spanked the 360," laughs Marcus Lehto – art director on the game. "I don't think we could have pushed that hardware any further than we did, otherwise it would have started smoking on your table. We juiced it. It was good."

Halo 3 was released to an audience of gamers that were becoming

was a lot of weight on us, but I think it made us work harder." When Halo 3 finally released, it proved that the 360's retail value was justified: Bungie's newest effort – aside from presenting the studio's now trademarked sci-fi world in glorious HD – incorporated small details that served to make the Halo experience feel even more

going back to Earth, the scale of it was all still there in ODST, too."

"Halo 3 was super polished, nothing was missing – it was very complete," reflects lead designer, Jaime Griesemer. "We explored everything we could possibly do in Halo 3. It was the complete realisation of that Halo ideology we had since the first game

"HALO 3 WAS SUPER POLISHED, NOTHING WAS MISSING – IT WAS VERY COMPLETE"
JAIME GRIESEMER, LEAD DESIGNER, HALO 3

dissatisfied with the new generation of hardware – nothing much had been done to prove the 360 and PS3 were pushing boundaries. It was still early in the console's life cycle, and it seemed Microsoft was getting nervous.

"There was a ton of pressure on our shoulders with Halo 3," Lehto continues, "and the intensity during production was palpable – we all came out of it with a few battle scars! But it was an opportunity for us to fix a lot of things that we felt didn't work too well in Halo 2… so we knew we had to look at the AI, we knew we had to make it all look nicer… there

complete: the stunning galactic vistas now had parallax mapping; draw distances could render real-time movement up to 16 kilometres away; and everything had its own real-time shadow (a small detail, but once you noticed it, you couldn't stop noticing it). It all played into making Halo 3 feel as epic as possible – this world-ending, climactic game would have fallen flat if it just felt the same as Halo 2…

"We lovingly called Halo a 'galactic romp'," reveals Lehto, "where Halo 2 became more of a space opera, and that epic kind-of saga continued into Halo 3, and even though you were

– look at the Scarab battles, right; we give the player a ton of tools, set them a seemingly impossible challenge and they have to figure it out."

The Scarab battles in question were some of Halo 3's most intense challenges, and felt like a deliberate nod to the original Star Wars trilogy – instead of having an X-Wing to take down AT-ATs, you had a Mongoose, or a Scorpion, or absolutely nothing to take down these monolithic walking death-bases. It was another reminder that Halo was more than just a game: it was sci-fi fiction, but interactive, player-directed, new.

HALO 3: ODST
THE FORGOTTEN SON

Exploring the cities on Earth offered a great playground to tell create some fantastic fiction," Lehto says when we question him about the domestic route Halo 3 and Halo 3: ODST took in bringing the Halo series to Earth. "If you start with the familiar in sci-fi, people don't find it that interesting," agrees Griesemer,

"but if you start with the foreign and alien, people naturally get curious about what humans are like in these situations, what Earth looks like."

ODST is an often maligned entry in the Halo-verse, but we here at games™ think it serves an incredibly important point in the overall arc: it humanises the narrative and gives

weight to Chief's high drama off on the Ark or on the Halo installations – your squad of Orbital Drop Shock Troopers aren't super-soldiers like Chief, and the immediate danger that surrounds them at all times during the game is a potent reminder as to how dangerous the zealous Covenant really are…

Year: 2010 System: Xbox 360

HALO
R E A C H

THE SWANSONG COMPOSED BY BUNGIE TO WAVE GOODBYE TO THE FRANCHISE THAT MADE IT FAMOUS, HALO: REACH WAS THE STUDIO'S MOST AMBITIOUS PROJECT TO DATE
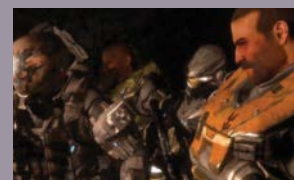

BUNGIE'S FINAL STAND

One of Reach's most memorable moments comes after the game is over – you're the last surviving member of Noble team, and you're thrown into a final stand with the Covenant: an unwinnable horde-mode style final mission that serves as a grizzly punctuation to Bungie's *Halo* tenure: it was well-paced, emotional and tense. "I proposed that idea of the final stand to [Bungie staff], and the initial reaction was: 'You should never kill the player like that in a game'," Lehto laughs. "You should never have *that* kind of finality – but, I thought, in this *one* situation, it was justified. I was proud of that, and I think it was executed well enough to have touched the foundation of the people that were playing it… at least I hope so!"

For *Reach*, we wanted to bring things full circle," reveals Marcus Lehto, who by this point in the franchise's life was creative director on the game. "We wanted to go back to *Halo*'s roots and say our final goodbye to the universe in a heartfelt way." *Reach* moved away from Master Chief, and instead was a prequel to the events of *Halo: Combat Evolved*, focusing instead on the heroic last stand of Noble team on human colony Reach's surface in the wake of a Covenant invasion.

"We had one final obligation to Microsoft," Lehto remembers, "and we could have phoned it in – made another small game that felt like *ODST*. But I didn't want to attach my name to something I wouldn't be *really* super proud of. We decided going back to the events prior to *Halo: CE* would be the most fitting way of saying goodbye."

No longer burdened by the weight of Master Chief and his legacy, Lehto and his team had free rein to change established *Halo* assets around a little. Because the game was set before established in-game canon,

"With *Reach*, we pushed the tech far, far further than we did with *Halo 3*," Lehto reflects. "We pushed those draw distances as far as they could go, we got more AI onscreen, we added more dynamic light, more weapons, more vehicles… we put every bit of passion we had into *Reach*. We killed ourselves making it."

Bungie had been forced to dial back parts of *Halo 3* to allow for the 360's hardware – the team had intended to simply port *Halo 3* assets into *Reach* to save on workload, but when it came to development, original assets were improved upon;

> "WE PUT EVERY BIT OF PASSION WE HAD INTO REACH. WE KILLED OURSELVES MAKING IT"
> **MARCUS LEHTO, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, HALO: REACH**

the Bungie artists went back to *Halo: CE*'s concept art, fleshing out the original ideas in the redesigned *Halo 3* engine – the Reach Grunt, for example, was based on an original sketch done for *Halo: CE* ten years earlier.

eventually, the assault rifle in *Reach* was composed of more polygons than a Marine character from *Halo 3*. "We always pushed for the highest bar in what we wanted to create with the Halo games," explains Lehto, "We made the player experience as flawless as we could."
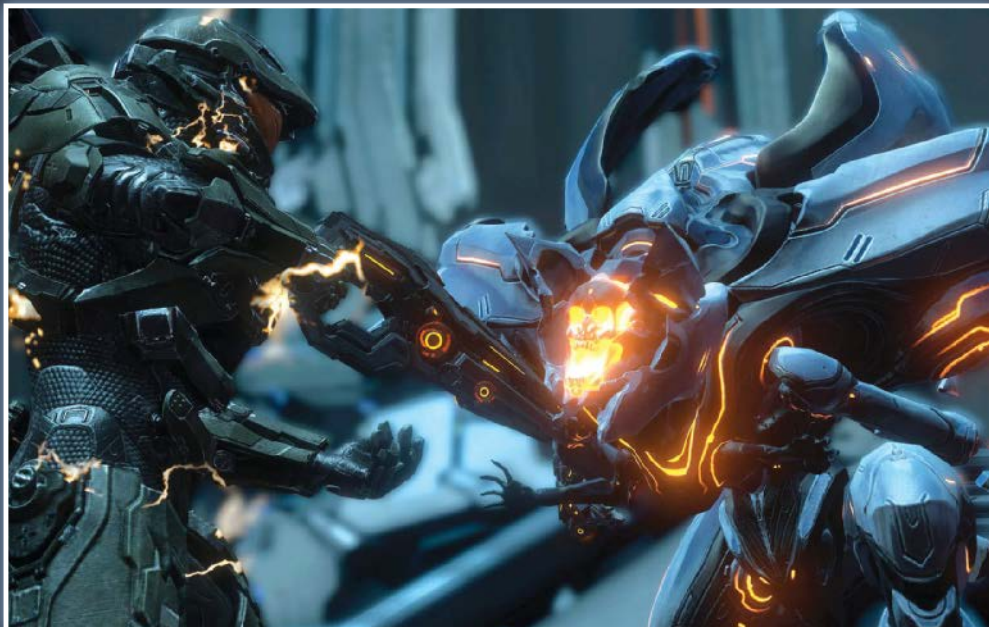
Year: 2012 **System:** Xbox 360

HALO 4

343'S FIRST CANONICAL RELEASE IN THE HALO UNIVERSE, HALO 4 LAID THE FOUNDATIONS FOR SOME HUGE CHANGES IN THE HALO MYTHOS WITH THE OMINOUS FORERUNNERS

Halo 4 had a lot to prove – not only was it 343 Industries' first full project (the studio's previous work on *Halo Anniversary* had prepared them well for a full development cycle), it was also the return of Chief – a facet of the *Halo* games that consumers had almost forgotten about after the emotional success of Noble Team in *Halo: Reach.*

Bringing back Chief seemed like an obvious move, though – even though his story seemed neatly wrapped up in the events of *Halo 3*, 343 knew there was more mileage in the power-armoured hero, and jetted him off into space once more to uncover the mysteries behind the enigmatic Forerunner race. While the narrative of the game veered off in a wholly new direction, most player's focus was glued to the multiplayer. Bungie games all have a very specific flavour – a certain humour, a certain pace, a certain craftsmanship – and long-time *Halo* players were eager to see if 343 could emulate that Bungie feeling.

"As developers, we want to make a game that's new and exciting, but not lose track of things that make *Halo*, well, *Halo*," details Kevin Franklin – lead designer at 343 Industries when we asked him about 343's philosophy when adding to the *Halo* library. "While building new game modes, maps, and experiences, we frequently go back and playtest legacy titles; they all set a very high benchmark. We also hired pro *Halo* gamers onto our development team and their feedback is immensely valuable in helping us shape new experiences."

One of these new multiplayer experiences 343 introduced was the divisive Dominion game mode – an ambitious playlist that combined *Halo*'s rich story assets with a capture-the-flag inspired multiplayer battle mode.

"Dominion was inspired by the ambition of *Reach*'s Firefight," explains Franklin, "we liked the deeper level of fictional immersion, and 343 shared a desire to do something big and bold and new. Creating new modes is a lot of fun, especially when you get to layer on all sorts of configurable options."

Max Hoberman – Creative Director at Certain Affinity, the studio that worked on a lot of *Halo 4*'s multiplayer – agrees: "That's one of the things that I love about *Halo*: the awesome variety of settings that you can (and should!) play around with. Games are meant to be fun, and the series has always embraced this and not taken itself too seriously in multiplayer."

"WHILE BUILDING NEW GAME MODES, MAPS, AND EXPERIENCES, WE FREQUENTLY GO BACK AND PLAYTEST LEGACY TITLES"
KEVIN FRANKLIN, LEAD DESIGNER, 343 INDUSTRIES

INTERVIEW
JEN TAYLOR
GAMES™ SPEAKS TO THE VOICE OF CORTANA

The narrative side of *Halo 4* was a more personal story between Cortana and Chief – focusing on Cortana's latent 'rampancy' finally kicking in. We spoke to Jen Taylor about her *Halo 4* experience.

**How do you feel Cortana has evolved since *Halo: CE*?**
What a joy it has been to play a character for so many years and see her grow and develop. I learned more about her every game which allowed me to better understand her and, I imagine, better embody her. She went from reluctant guide in the first game to intimate colleague in the most recent.

How did it feel going 'rampant' and playing what is effectively an insane person for the latter half of *Halo 4*?
It was an absolute blast to journey down the dark path that the writers took Cortana on in the last game. It's a gift when someone asks you to let loose and lose your mind on mic. Truly. Super freeing and fun and scary. It was exhausting at times, but I am always up for a challenge.

**What's been your favourite Cortana moment from the game series so far?**
Her final scene. Hands down. Steve and I worked very hard on that scene. It felt like a culmination of all the work we'd done up to that point. It was very emotional and, I'll not lie, many tears were shed.
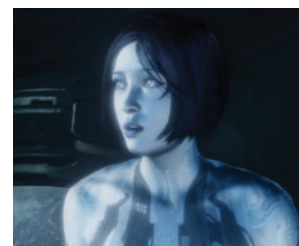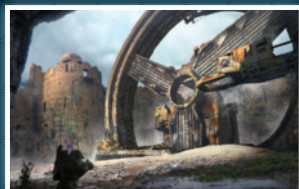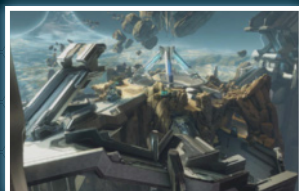
Year: 2014 System: Xbox One

● The cutscenes in *Halo 2 Anniversary* have been completely remade by Blur using the originals as a template.
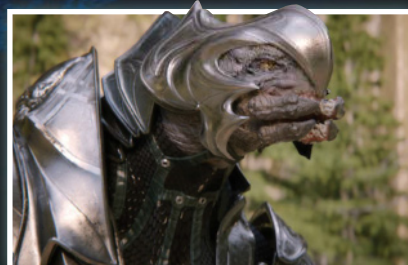
HALO
THE MASTER CHIEF COLLECTION
A TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE AND THE BEGINNING OF A NEW ERA

After celebrating the 10th anniversary of the series debut with *Halo Anniversary*, new custodians of the franchise 343 Industries realised there was still a market for a generation of gamers that had cut their teeth on *Halo*'s multiplayer elements, alongside those that hankered for the earlier crusades of the enigmatic Chief upscaled.

"As we started development it occurred to us that we've now got more power to play with. So we started thinking that we wanted to take advantage of that power, and with *Halo 2: Anniversary* it's like the ability to transition the music with the graphics and all of that good stuff, *at the same time*. So we started thinking, 'Well, with *Halo 5* coming, it's a new

With no backwards compatibility on the new Xbox hardware, 343 is sating the appetites of gamers who are now in their 20s – gamers that want to reconnect with the stories that matured along with their taste in games. "It's been a really fun process for us," explains Ayoub. "You know, when we did the first *Anniversary* I talked about how that was the game,

"WHILE BUILDING NEW GAME MODES, MAPS, AND EXPERIENCES, WE FREQUENTLY GO BACK AND PLAYTEST LEGACY TITLES"
DAN AYOUB, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER FOR HALO, 343 INDUSTRIES

● Six classic *Halo 2* maps have been completely rebuilt with the newest engine for *The Master Chief Collection*.

Enter *The Master Chief Collection* – a project literally four times as ambitious as *Halo: Anniversary*. "With the first *Halo: Anniversary*, we wanted to do something special for the ten-year anniversary," explains the Collection's producer, Dan Ayoub. "But the landscape had changed a little bit; when we started development on *Halo 2: Anniversary*, we knew we wanted to do a similar treatment to the first one.

generation, how do we bring all of these games and the next one?'

"We can go a lot further, it turns out, than just *Halo 2: Anniversary*! We can give fans *Halo* [CE] to *Halo 4* all on one disc at the same time, and not only let people bring their collections forward, but to also prepare for *Halo 5*. I liken it a lot to binging on Netflix before a next season of something comes out; it's a great way for people to catch up."

for a lot of people, that showed you could have a shooter on consoles. *As* you look at modern games like *Call Of Duty* and *Titanfall*, they really owe their legacy to *Halo 2*'s multiplayer. Going back to it has just been a fantastic stroll down memory lane. That was really the game, on a personal level, that got me playing multiplayer on console, like for so many others. It's been an absolute blast."

HALO 5
GUARDIANS / HALO:NIGHTFALL
A NEW CHALLENGER HAS ENTERED THE RING

Year: 2015 **System:** Xbox One

The sprawling sci-fi universe created by *Halo* has never just been about the gameplay – between books, graphic novels, live action TV shows, *Halo Waypoint* and a myriad of other online content (including a Bungie produced ARG game playfully titled 'I Love Bees'), *Halo* has established itself as one of the most complex and complete sci-fi universes in fiction. Master Chief is merely one thread in a narrative tapestry that extends beyond our solar system, and beyond recorded history.

Halo 5 plans to build on what *Halo 4* trailed in the Spartan Ops section of the game, although it's going to be a bit more experimental than *Halo 4*'s episodic mission structure: this time, Microsoft is going to run a dedicated TV series alongside *Guardians*. This has only been done once before – with SyFy's *Defiance* cross-releasing as a game and ongoing TV show. *Defiance* performed poorly as a game, yet has gained a cult following as a TV show – if Microsoft takes its cues from SyFy and learns from the production company's mistakes, the *Halo 5* project could be an incredibly successful cross-media outing.

But it's not just the fragmentation of the game that interests us: when *Halo 4* was announced, under the banner of 343, the developer announced it would be the first entry in a whole new *Halo* trilogy – the 'Reclaimer' saga. Since *Halo 5*'s announcement and subsequent information drip-feed, Microsoft Studio's vice president Phil Spencer has stated the publisher and developer have U-turned on that decision – that the 'Reclaimer' saga will likely expand beyond a three-game narrative arc because the studio 'didn't want to limit themselves'.

Halo 5: Guardians will be written by Brian Reed – a notable comic scribe who's taking a break from a long career in comics to join 343 full-time. Reed is a *Halo* veteran, having worked on Marvel's *Halo: Fall of Reach* series, a three issue short – *Initiation* – and the on-going Dark Horse *Halo* comic series *Escalation*. But, for us, his most notable work was on the second volume of Marvel's *Ms. Marvel* series, in which he took the dormant Carol Danvers character and mixed her aggressive personality with insecurity, »
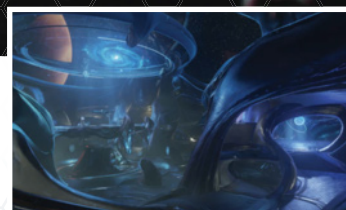
● Agent Locke is going to be a second playable character in *Halo 5* with his origin detailed in *Nightfall.*
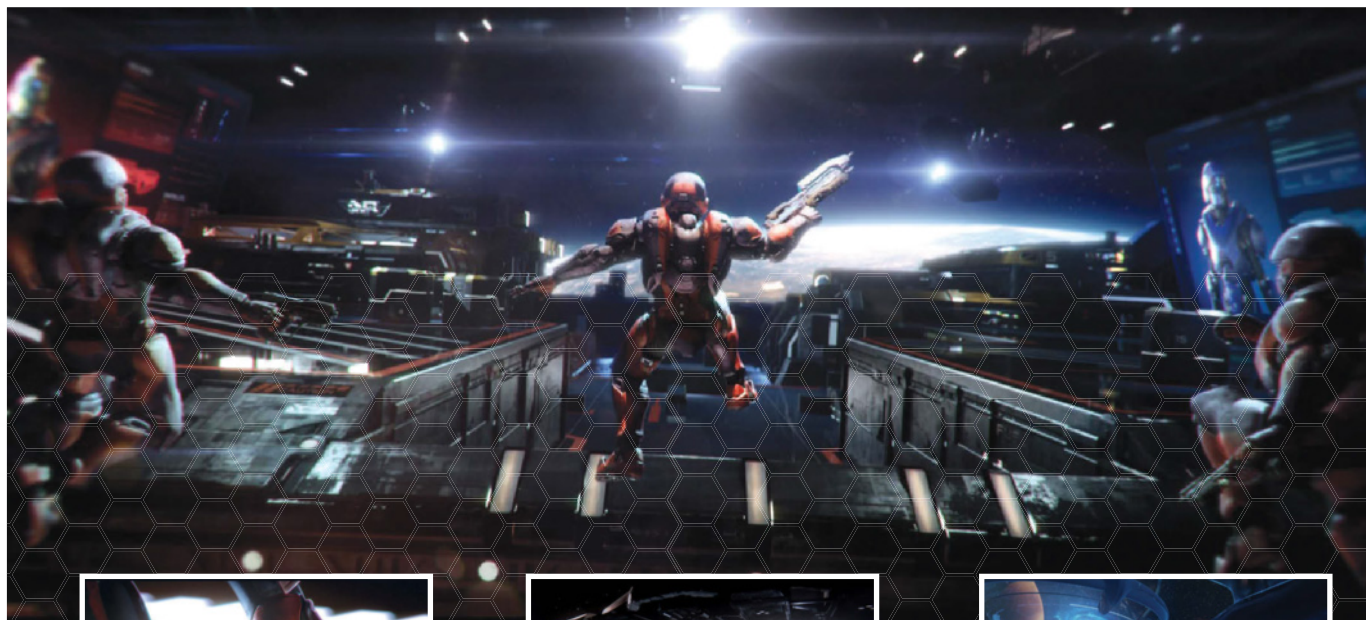
● Access to the *Halo 5* beta will be included with every copy of *The Master Chief Collection* this year.

● The beta will last for three weeks starting from 29 December 2014. It's one of the longest and earliest for a *Halo* game.

● 343 seems keen to test tight firefights with this beta, concentrating on classic 4v4 team deathmatch to start.

"LOCKE'S A THINKER, HE'S VERY LOGICAL, VERY PRECISE… WHEN HE COMES ACROSS SOMETHING THAT HE BELIEVES IN, HE MAKES HIS DECISION AND DOESN'T LOOK BACK"

MIKE COLTER

FINISH THE FIGHT

We asked Marcus Lehto what he thought of the direction 343 is taking with *Halo*, and how he feels about the studio's custody of the franchise. "It feels like [343] took my baby, who went off to college and got married to someone else, and are doing something else with it! I respect what they did – but using the Forerunner tech to create this more magical feeling in *Halo 4*? That was a risky direction to take – but I agree they needed to do something different. [*Halo*'s] longevity is a double-edged sword: you need to appease the hardcore crowd, but if you change things too much people say 'It's no longer *Halo*'. It's a tough line to walk, and I have continued respect for 343 and what [it's] doing with *Halo*."

● You can follow Agent Jameson Locke's journey from ONI agent to Spartan IV in the new *Halo: Nightfall* show starting this November.

● *Nightfall* takes place on a disintigrating Halo ring as ONI investigates a terrorist attack.

● *Nightfall*'s five episode run will be released weekly from the launch of *The Master Chief Collection* and viewable through the new Halo Channel on Xbox.
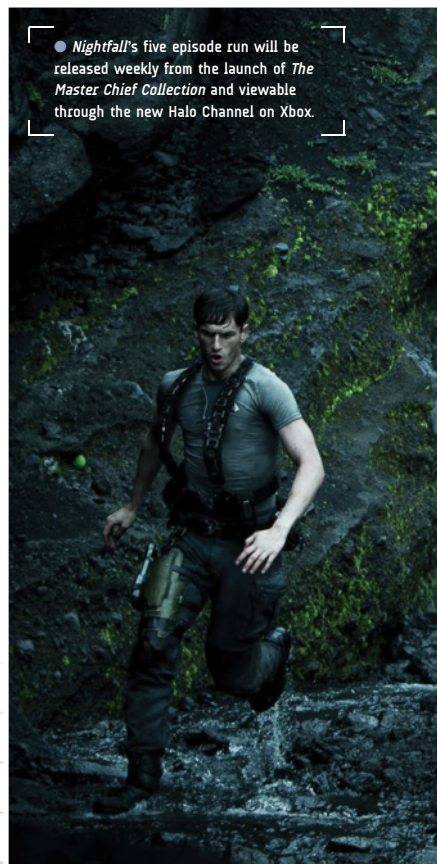
compassion and a devotion to being a hero... traits that all seem very familiar to *Halo* fans, between mainstay heroes Chief and Cortana.

But this isn't a Chief story – at least not centrally. Both *Nightfall* and *Guardians* will revolve around newcomer Jameson Locke – a surly UNSC-drafted soldier brought in to hunt Master Chief down after he goes rogue, following the events of *Halo 4*. Chief is pursuing the traitorous Dr. Halsey – the woman responsible for creating the Spartans and Cortana – in the hopes that she can restore Cortana to her former working parameters (the AI is, after all, modelled on Halsey herself). It's an ambitious move – introducing a whole new character five games into the central canonical narrative – but Kiki Wolfkill, executive producer of the *Halo* franchise at large, is confident it's the right call.

"We're always thinking of new ways of telling the *Halo* story, whether that's in live action pieces, comics or anything else. We're also always considering what the best way of communicating character is – think about the game; you see one side of things, really, so what's the best way of letting you get to know these other characters, these other places in the world? That's what we're exploring [with *Nightfall*]."

S ci-fi virtuoso Ridley Scott has been recruited by 343 to act as producer on the film, a decision that makes sense, considering what Wolfkill told us: Scott is a master of domesticating science fiction, of turning the outlandish – the exotic, the cosmically foreign – into something immediately identifiable and accessible. *Halo* needs that: it needs the human touch, something to make us care about these characters we've followed to the edges of known space and back.

"We had a pretty interesting first meeting with Scott – he told us [*Halo*] was a universe he was interested in, and he was intrigued with the things we were doing," explains Wolfkill. "For him it was interesting to have a universe that was somewhat established to play around in, and it was funny to see [he noticed] the elements of his work that *Halo* had leaned on in the past – and vice versa,

too: I think he's been influenced by things we've done before."

So where does Locke come into this? It seems that the new protagonist is the connection the franchise needs to bring that human element into the universe: unlike Chief, Locke isn't a full Spartan when we meet him – we get to see his face, we get to understand his motives, we get to live alongside him for a while and take a good hard look at what he's about – something we never got to do with the stoic John-117.

"Locke's a thinker, he's very logical, very precise and he doesn't do anything half-cocked," explains the actor behind Agent Locke's helmet, Mike Colter. "He really takes in everything, takes in the information and relies on his team to help him make the right decisions. But when he comes across something that he believes in, he makes his decision and doesn't look back."

The *Nightfall* experience was written as a feature film, but is being broken into episodic segments to be released concurrently with *Halo 5: Guardians*. The live-action portion of the whole *Halo 5* package will »

● Many of the teaser images so far for *Halo 5: Guardians* are showing a lot of incredibly impressive urban settings. Very different to the teaser trailer.

"WE'RE ALWAYS THINKING OF NEW WAYS OF TELLING THE HALO STORY, WHETHER THAT'S IN LIVE ACTION PIECES, COMICS OR ANYTHING ELSE"
**KIKI WOLFKILL, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER FOR HALO, 343 INDUSTRIES**

» focus on Locke travelling to a planet new to the *Halo* universe to quieten a threatening Covenant presence. "[*Nightfall*] is basically Locke dealing with a terrorist threat immediately," explains Colter. "There's a treaty with the Covenant and Locke goes to the planet Sedra because he suspects there's been a breach of the treaty. There's talk of a bomb that's been built and that's a direct violation. It's sort of like, 'Here we are in America, we're always suspecting who might have nuclear capabilities, and what we're dealing with is similar: we are trying to figure out who is a threat against the humans. If the treaty is broken there's the implication of war, and we deal with that immediately.' It's a manhunt of sorts. With the information Locke and his team has discovered, they are going to have to find out what's what."

The Covenant are up to their old tricks, and it's down to a small crew of professionals to step up and take action.

Bringing Locke into the universe in both a cinematic and gameplay way is a pincer attack on those expecting 'just another Master Chief game'. After all, with 343 releasing *The Master Chief Collection* later this year, it makes sense to focus on a fresh face – and it gives the writers a chance to really try something new in a universe where humans have been on the back foot all too often.

"I think it's an advantage not knowing much about the *Halo* world. It's almost like... the ignorance of the gaming world and of the *Halo* franchise helped me a lot," Colter explains when we ask if he was au fait with the vast *Halo* mythos before jumping on-board with *Halo 5*. "If I'd have known exactly how big it was, I think there would have been a lot more pressure! It's nice to go into something, to really create something from an artistic aspect and working in a bubble, than to be completely
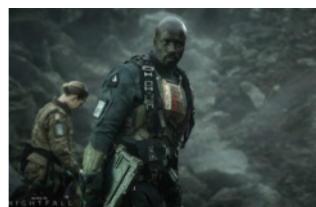
● 343 and Microsoft seem keen to establish Locke as a new linchpin of the Halo franchise.

exposed to the scope of what you're doing. In doing so I think we are creating a character that [the audience] don't know, and also they haven't really had a lot of fleshed-out characters before. The series has its characters, but this is the first time you get to see one of these [Spartans] sans helmet, sans armour; you're going to see a human guy trying to get through life and trying to make some decisions like everyone else."

It's an interesting approach that 343 is taking with the *Halo* experience, and one that seems to be a response to a criticism often levied at the franchise: that you play as a brute, an automaton without emotions who's just carrying out orders. By bringing the player in and making them care about Locke in *Nightfall*, it's going to aid their agency in Guardians – making Locke's manhunt for Master Chief an experience worthy of the *Halo* name.

"I am a playable character in *Halo 5*," reveals Colter. "[Agent Locke] is one of the primary characters. Once [*Guardians*] comes out, you're basically going to be playing a game with me as the primary character. I'll have some cool weaponry, and some cool abilities, because by that time I'll be a Spartan IV. You can feel like you're playing as your favourite character, because [after *Nightfall*] you *know* Jameson Locke, and it's that human connection I wanted to bring to the role."